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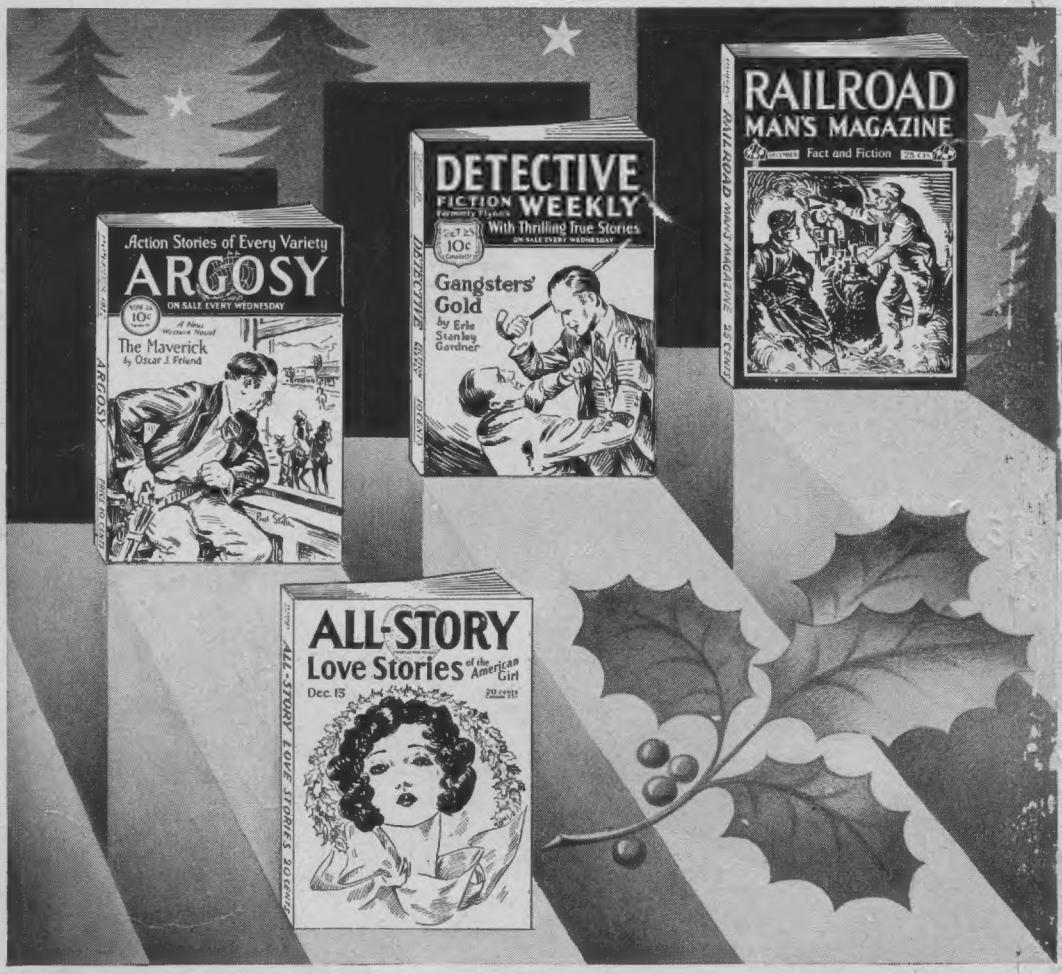

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President C. T. DIXON, Vice President

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,
8, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4 111 Rue Réaumur

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VOLUME 217 SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1930 NUMBER 3

The white creature lay quivering, flapping in the dirt road

Tama of the Light Country

All New England was terrorized by the mysterious midnight raids on girls' camps and lonely homes—nor was that terror lessened by the suspicion that the kidnapers were not of this world

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Fire People," "The Man Who Was Two Men," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SCREAMS IN THE NIGHT.

THE first of the strange midnight raids was made upon a girls' school on Moose Head Lake, in Maine. It was a summer camp on the lake, with something like eighty girls, almost all between the ages of fifteen and twenty. The affair—which occurred during the night of August 10 and 11, 1950—was kept as secret as possible. It did not get into the newspapers, nor did the newscasters send it over the air until about a week later.

But it terrorized the immediate

neighborhood at once. Little wonder! There were ten of the girls missing when, despite the confusion and terror, the others could be counted. Two more were dead. The principal, a Professor White, was wounded. Two of the other men teachers were killed, and one of the matrons.

I heard of the affair about noon of August 11th. I was twenty-five years of age that summer of 1950 when the mysterious attack upon the White Summer Camp in Maine began those fantastic events which brought a menace to two worlds and an utter chaos on one of them.

I am Jack Dean, a newsgatherer for the Broadcasters' Press Association, and occasionally doing some actual newscasting.

I was in the New York studios of the B. P. A., had just been on the air with a routine news account, when the aviator Jimmy Turk called me on long distance from Boston.

"Take your plane and come up," he told me. His voice was vibrant with excitement. "Drop your work. Tell 'em it's business, the biggest piece of news of the year—if you can get a release on it!"

Jimmy Turk was an operative of the newly established Interstate Flying Patrol. A friend from my university days, though of recent years we had not seen much of one another. A short, stocky, red-headed little daredevil, this Turk—one of the most skillful, wildest flyers in the service.

"Trouble up at Moose Head Lake in Maine," he went on. "Meet you at Bangor—the Lancet Field. We'll go in my Dragon, leave your tub-boat there. What time will you be up? Four o'clock? The devil! If you leave now you can be there by three, or earlier."

"For how long, Jimmy? An overnight job?"

"Tell 'em you don't know. A day or two. A week. Just tell 'em it's the biggest thing ever—if you get it for the air. It's been suppressed so far. I'm in it from the police end. Damn it, Jack, don't make me talk. There's no time."

I FLEW up the coast and met him at the Lancet Field in mid afternoon. He was wild-eyed; his fiery red hair tousled; his whole little body shaking with excitement. It was the strain of waiting for me. With action Jimmy Turk was cool and calculatingly deliberate.

He hustled me into his fleet little Dragon—the smallest, swiftest thing that flies.

"I've been over there and back. It isn't far; half an hour or so."

We settled down in his tiny oval cockpit. He lifted us and we sped away over the forest reaches toward the famous lake. It was a surprisingly wild country for this day and age—a playground for summer vacationists, yet there were deserted lakes and unbroken stretches of primeval forest.

"Well, Jimmy, now that we're here, what's the trouble?" I put in jovially. "Something drastic?"

"No trouble—nothing at all except about ten young girls abducted, a few killed, and a few other miscellaneous murders."

He told me all he had learned about it. Little enough, in truth. It was wholly confused—a chaos of conflicting accounts, none of which dovetailed to make any rational explanation.

The White Summer Camp for Girls consisted of a group of log-cabin style bungalows set on a promontory of the lake, with a larger cabin as mess-hall.

A boathouse with canoes, a dock, float, and diving board were at the end of the point. There was a small stable with saddle horses, and a taxi-runway leading from the lake to a hangar-garage in which several small sport planes of hydroplane type were housed for such of the pupils whose parents would allow and could afford the use of them.

The camp was in one of the wildest portions of the lake. Unbroken forest lay about it, with only a few houses in the neighborhood and a dirt road leading to the nearest village three miles away.

The place was in a turmoil when we arrived. Planes lay thick on the water about the runway. The road was jammed with automobiles. A police cordon was about the camp to keep the crowd back, but inside the lines there was a group of excited officials, investigators, and curiosity-seekers who had the pull to get in there.

The pupils—such of them who were not killed, or vanished—had fled to their homes. Professor White lay unconscious in a Bangor hospital. What he had to tell, if there were anything rational, as yet remained undisclosed.

The affair was secret. It was held off the air, and out of the printed press; but by word of mouth the news had spread like flames before a wind in prairie grass. We got through the lines. Jimmy had a conference with his superior; I wandered about the place, talking with as many of the excited people as I could, picking up a connected story of a sort for use provided they let me give it out.

A weird, disjointed account, indeed. So far as I could piece it together, it ran like this:

At about midnight the previous night the camp was aroused by the wild screaming of some of the girls. The night was dark. This was a period of nearly full moon, but heavy clouds had obscured it. And a night of noises.

A fresh wind off the lake pounded waves on the shore and sang through the forest trees.

But above the noise the screams of terror-stricken girls had sounded. There were evidently screams from everywhere about the camp within a few minutes. But most of it was the panic of terror.

THE original alarm came from one of the larger cabin dormitories where twelve girls and a matron were sleeping. The doors and windows were all open; the unbroken forest depths lay only a few paces away. Something or some one, human or otherwise, had made an attack. When it was over—in a few moments, no doubt, and before any one from the adjacent buildings seemed to have reached there—ten of the girls from that cabin had vanished. The matron lay dead just outside the doorway. One of the girls were found dead on the floor beside her bed; the other lay across the road at the edge of the forest.

The two men instructors, and Professor White, were all found on the road; they had evidently been running toward the sound of the screams when they were struck down.

I had an opportunity later to see one of the bodies where it lay in the police station of the near-by village. All the deaths were from the same cause. A hole the size of a lead pencil in the chest, penetrating the heart. Or in the head, piercing the brain. But

there was no bullet. Nor had there been any sound of shots—every account agreed on that.

Some weapon wholly soundless had drilled the victims. It seemed like a burn; a blast of intense heat burning a tiny round hole. Through flesh, or the bone of the skull, it was the same.

No one had seen any of the attackers. Hysterical pupils told of vague shadowy forms of men along the road. Men huge; but some said small. There were other girls who claimed that they were not men at all, but weird monsters half like beasts in pseudo-human form. And there was mention of dragging, shuffling footsteps in the underbrush—presumably the fantastic monsters dragging away their screaming victims.

Most of this was discredited by the investigators. The night was too dark and n o i s y to see anything, or hear very much. But the ten girls were vanished; there were five dead bodies—very tangible evidence! And the wounded, perhaps dying, Professor White.

There may have been strange footprints about the place. But if so, they were trampled upon and obliterated long before the authorities got there. There was another clew which appeared to be fact, since every one agreed in the telling of it. The attackers used no lights; but there had been a few soundless, blue-green flashes in the darkness. Little stabs of light. Tiny beams a few feet in length, instantaneous, like a miniature lightning bolt. Presumably these were the shots of some unknown weapon which had killed the five victims.

Jimmy Turk joined me. "Well, what do you make of it, Jack? Come here and meet Dr. Grenfell."

He inserted us into an excited group near by and detached a short, thick-set middle-aged man with a massive head and a stoop to his wide shoulders which made him look almost like a hunchback.

"Who was that?" I demanded, when, after a moment, Dr. Grenfell had hurried away from us.

"Scientific fellow. Head of the Bolton Astronomical Research Society. He's investigating this—one of the first to get here this morning."

"What's astronomy got to do with it?"

"I'm damned if I know, Jack."

But we were very soon to find out!

SUCH was the beginning of the mysterious assaults. A heavy guard was placed about the White Camp that night. One or two of the men teachers remained there, and three of the women.

Mrs. White was at her husband's bedside in Bangor. The professor still lay unconscious, hovering between life and death. His lung had been pierced; he had fallen in the road, struck his head and suffered a brain concussion. But the physicians hoped to pull him through.

What had he seen in the darkness of that weird night assault? We were all waiting eagerly for that time when he might be able to tell.

There was one girl pupil who remained in the camp—an orphan, who lived with the Whites both winter and summer. I met her a few days later.

That second night was as dark as the one preceding. The cordon of police and a few State troopers were hidden about the camp and in its buildings. But nothing happened. Jimmy's orders were to fly at about two thousand feet back and forth over the lake. I went with him.

We flew his Dragon without lights and with the engines fully muffled. Both of us realized that the authorities knew more of this thing—or suspected more—than we could guess. We were told to watch for any air vehicle rising or descending over the lake or the near-by forest; or for any strange lights. But there seemed nothing.

At dawn we landed at the village, turned in our report, and went to sleep. At about noon Jimmy woke me.

"By the gods, Jack, listen to this!"

The White Camp had been undisturbed. But from a town thirty miles away came the report that a young girl had vanished from her home during the night. It was an isolated farmhouse, with the girl's room on the lower floor.

Her parents said she had retired as usual; they had heard nothing; but in the morning she was gone. One of her window shutters had been taken off, the wood around its hinges burned as though by a blow torch.

"And there are others, Jack! This damnable, weird business!"

Other reports were coming in. Another girl was found murdered; her heart pierced by the same strange hole burned into her chest. She had screamed in the night; they had found her lying by her bed; a chair had been overturned with evidence of a struggle. And two girls, sleeping together, told of a queerly horrible face at their window — gray, thick-featured, flabby. They had heard dragging, shuffling footsteps outside as the face vanished. One of them said it was like a man paralyzed and trying to walk.

During the next few days a flood of such incidents were reported from all this section of the State. But except for those first two nights there were no missing girls, and no murders. Merely strange things that girls claimed to have seen and heard. Some seemed to have a fair basis of fantastic rationality—but most of the reports were now the product of hysteria.

"THE thing is about over," said Dr. Grenfell, as he, with Jimmy, myself and one or two others, sat examining the reports in the dining hall of the White Camp. "There is nothing more undependable than reports from adolescent girls. This is hysteria now."

But there were occurrences which were not the imaginings of hysteria. The aërial patrols had observed strange light-glows down in the forest.

One pilot had even seen a shape rushing upward from the lake. He was some miles away from it and could not reach it with his light. He described it as a shape like a vague silver ball, mounting with tremendous velocity into the leaden clouds overhead. This was reported by one of the air patrols, of which fully fifty were on duty. And there were surface parties constantly searching the forests of the entire State. Every effort was being made to recover the missing girls, but it was all unavailing.

It was about this time that I met the single girl pupil who was living at the White Camp. Her name was Rowena Palisse. Romantic circumstances surrounded her. She was a ward of the Whites. Ten years ago her only relative, an elder brother, Guy, had invented a Space-rocket and endeavored to reach the Moon. It was acknowledged to be a suicidal attempt; he had provided no way of returning.

I had been fifteen then; I still recalled my boyish interest in this Guy Palisse Moon-rocket. It had successfully left the Earth, but never was

heard of again. My interest now was renewed by meeting this sister of the adventurer who had so stirred my youthful fancy.

Rowena Palisse was twenty-two years old now. A very tall girl, fully five feet ten or eleven inches. Not slim, but slender, with a regal aspect in her bearing. Her long, brown braids hung forward over her shoulders in the modern fashion. Her modish long skirt and short-waisted jacket made her seem even taller than she was. A handsome girl, rather than beautiful. A girl of so queenly an aspect that she seemed born to command. A Nordic queen; she had a heritage of that, I feel sure.

But there was a gentle, wholly feminine softness about her as well. I understood that she had loved devotedly her brother Guy. As a child of twelve she had watched him with big wondering, frightened eyes as his cumbersome rocket carried him away from her into the mysteries of outer Space.

I found that look in her eyes now. A gentle, wondering softness—a wistfulness. It had spread to mark her whole demeanor. There was a poise in her manner, a calm dignity; but under it, wistfulness.

I stood before her, that first afternoon when Jimmy Turk introduced us. She was a head taller than the wiry little patrol flyer. But I am several inches over six feet; she extended her hand and smiled up at me.

"I have seen you for several days past. I wondered when some one would introduce us."

I WAS with Rowena Palisse a good deal during those ensuing afternoons. I made the occasions. She was frightened at the events which had transpired, but there was nothing hysterical about her. A matured girl, with a poised intellect which precluded hysteria.

I was more amazed at it when I realized that the investigators—there were a number of them still here, including Dr. Grenfell—still felt that another assault might be made, and they were for some reason using Rowena as a possible decoy. She made herself prominent about the grounds, both by day and night, though always carefully, secretly guarded.

Then there came a night—it was just a week after the original assault—when the trap was sprung. Dr. Grenfell, who was in charge here, had admitted me in the capacity of assistant. Perhaps because Rowena did not hide her friendly interest in me; and because my giant stature made me one who could put up a good fight with any midnight marauder.

This was a black, overcast night. There had been a great show of withdrawal of the guards that afternoon—though after dark many of them had crept back.

Jimmy and I, armed with automatics, crouched with Dr. Grenfell in the forest underbrush just across the road from Rowena's lighted window. She stood at it a moment, braiding her hair. And though there were a dozen armed men lurking close at hand to protect her, I marveled at her poise.

Her light went out. We waited, an hour or two at least. The heavy leaden clouds hung close overhead. The wind swished through the tree-tops; the lake waves pounded the shore; the dark silent buildings of the White Camp stood around us.

It began to rain a little. I was cold and stiff. Beside me the bulk of Dr. Grenfell's figure was a hunched black blob. At my feet Jimmy crouched like

a coiled spring. There was a dim vista of the road; the roof-outline of the building near us, and the vague black rectangle of Rowena's open window.

There came at last a sound, different from those of the forest to which we had listened for so long. An eerie, indefinable sound. Quite close to us. We all three heard it. Dr. Grenfell stirred a trifle. Jimmy tensed, ready to leap.

A rustling of the bushes. Or was it out in the road?

I was swept suddenly with the chilling sense that this Unknown was supernatural. Something advancing upon me, invisible, intangible!

From the darkness of the road the sound became clearer. Footsteps. But they were gruesomely unnatural, uncanny. Dragging, shuffling footsteps, like a wounded thing dragging itself heavily along.

A moment or two. Jimmy touched me in warning, but I shoved off his hand. Dr. Grenfell's electric torch was raised. We had arranged not to move, or shoot, until he flashed it on.

Certainly something tangible was out there in the road. I thought I could distinguish a slowly moving, formless shape. Or perhaps two shapes, mingled in the darkness.

Abruptly there was another noise, a swishing, flapping sound. Not on the road, but over it. A monster, flying; or a giant bird. I saw something white, fluttering out there.

Dr. Grenfell's torch flashed on. Figures were disclosed in the road some twenty feet from us. Figures so fantastic the sight of them barely registered on my bewildered brain. A gigantic man-shape. Another, similar but smaller. And a great fluttering white thing behind and above them.

Jimmy leaped, with me after him. My shot and Grenfell's stabbed the darkness together. The forest rang with the other guards rushing and firing. From the road came an answering "shot"—a tiny stab of blue-green light. It sizzled close past me, withering the shrubbery. The gigantic figure in the road made a slow desperate bound into the underbrush. The smaller figure fell with our shots. The white thing was hit; it came fluttering down; lay quivering—flapping in the dirt of the road.

No one thought, those first moments, of pursuing the escaping figure. With swaying torches we gathered in the road. A man lay there, dead from our shots. A squat, thick-set fellow clad in rude garments of animal skins. His flat-featured face was heavy with pouchy gray skin and goggling, staring dead eyes.

Near him, the wounded white thing lay struggling in death agony. A girl! Her blue-white draperies were stained crimson with her blood. A small, strangely frail-looking girl, with huge blue-feathered wings nearly as long as her body! They flapped, and then were still; she lay sprawled on the road like a great dead bird!

We bent over her. She was still alive. For a moment she tried to speak. It seemed that the words were English! I thought that she gasped, "—warn you—" But we could distinguish nothing else intelligible. And presently she was dead.

CHAPTER II.

FROM ANOTHER PLANET.

THAT was the last of the incidents at the White Camp. But such an affair could not be kept secret. The world rang with it.

For a time, however, it seemed des-

tined forever to be shrouded in mystery. Professor White died without recovering consciousness. The body of the man we had shot, and the strange winged girl with him, remained as the only tangible evidence. The giant figure which had made off into the forest was not caught. Nor were any of the missing girls recovered.

There was a weapon found in the road that night where we gathered over the two bodies. It was quite evidently the projector of the blue-green bolts. A small, globular affair, with a mesh of wires across its face, a firing mechanism, and what seemed a queer form of storage battery in its handle.

What current it may have used could not be determined. The thing was empty of charge when found; evidently its last available shot had been the blue-green stab which sizzled past me.

The two bodies were examined by many learned men before they were interred. Obviously the winged girl was nothing of Earth. Nor could the man be identified with any race on this planet. Yet the two were clearly not of the same race.

One extremely curious circumstance was brought out by this investigation. The man's body was short and abnormally thick-set; ape-like, but with a flabby, pallid, hairless skin. A man of such build would normally weigh a full hundred and seventy pounds. I was present at the investigation. Gazing at the body, I was convinced it would weigh a hundred and seventy. Yet on the scales it weighed a hundred and twenty-two. A different density. I felt of the body. Small-boned—a light skeleton. And the flesh was putty-like, with what seemed microscopic air-cells in it.

The girl was an extraordinarily beautiful little creature. Fantastic, with those great blue-feathered wings arching out from her shoulder-blades. But her face, composed now in death, was humanly beautiful, with a delicate ethereal beauty.

She seemed certainly no more than sixteen years old. A clear white skin which in life might have been flushed rose-pink. Long pale-golden hair. Blue eyes. A queerly frail-looking body, yet rounded almost to matured girlhood.

She was four feet seven inches tall. Such a girl might have weighed a hundred pounds. This one, with allowances for the weight of the wings, weighed only sixty-five pounds.

Queer, inexplicable facts! And I could not forget that this dying winged girl had tried to speak to us in English! That, to me, seemed most inexplicable of all.

BY the end of August the world was beginning to talk less of the affair. Then, on August 30 Dr. Grenfell made public his paper of theory, and explanation—and warning. It was more startling than anything which had gone before.

I give here, not the original paper which was couched in the more technical and detailed phraseology of science, but the transcription made for the general public which Dr. Grenfell gave me to put on the air:

"The affair at the White Camp occurred on the night of August 10. On the previous night upon one of the star-field photo-diagram plates made in the routine work of the Lowell Observatory at Flagstaff, Arizona, a dot of curious aspect showed which had no logical right to be there. With a subsequent, longer exposure made a few minutes later, that dot became a tiny hairline streak of light, proving that it was in motion.

"Observations made at the Lowell Observatory that night established the conviction that the dot was something extremely small and quite close to the Earth—only a few thousand miles beyond the upper reaches of our atmosphere.

"The Mount Wyndam Observatory, near Summit, New Jersey, made similar observations during the early evening of August 10th. But the dot was moving fast, and soon disappeared to the northward. And the sky became overcast as the evening advanced, preventing further observation.

"The inescapable conclusion of both observatories is that this was some form of interplanetary vehicle hovering above our earth. Spectrographs showed it to be shining with reflected sunlight. How far away it was, how great its velocity, or what was its size, could not be determined.

"Other strange facts came to light during that memorable week of August 10th to 17th. Many of them apparently were unrelated. On the night of August 10th, a shooting star of abnormal aspect was reported by many eyewitnesses in Maine. It fell very slowly from a point near the zenith toward the northern horizon. The 'star' was pale-white.

"A meteor, which generally is a mere fragment of star-dust burning with the heat of friction as it hits our atmosphere, blazes with a streak of fire for an instant; and then, consuming itself, burns out and vanishes. But this was different. It seemed floating down, glowing with a silvery light. A few moments, and then it disappeared from view.

"The observatory at Flagstaff saw nothing of this. But at Mount Wyndam they saw it! The thing seemed a silvery metallic ball. It glowed with friction-heat and with sunlight. But when it descended into the night-shadow of Earth, it was seen no more. The time was 8:55 P. M.

"This, we believe, was a smaller vehicle descending from the larger one hovering out there in Space. As a tender comes from a liner lying outside the shoals, this silver ball came down with its human occupants and landed somewhere in the forests or upon one of the lakes in Maine!

"And other facts: This smaller vehicle—though there may have been several of them—was observed subsequent to August 10th, upon at least two occasions by pilots of our patrol flyers. The sky, day and night in Maine and vicinity, was during that week almost constantly obscured by heavy clouds. At a hundred thousand feet such vehicles would be safe from discovery.

"One of our climbing planes, with Navy pilot Rankin, present holder of the altitude record, on the night of August 12th, and again during the day, ascended over Quogg, Maine, to a height of sixty-five thousand feet—but discovered nothing. As a matter of fact, an interplanetary vehicle—these silver balls for instance—could easily attain a velocity enabling them to follow the night-shadow around the world.

"WE are forced to the conclusion that the attacks upon the White Camp and elsewhere in Maine were made by beings of human form and intelligence from another planet. But which one? To our knowledge, whether or not any of the other planets of the Solar System are inhabited has been problematical. Yet here is proof!

"We believe that these beings came

from the planet Mercury, and have now returned there. Many astronomical and astro-physical phenomena recently observed lead to that conclusion. And so do the biological facts concerning the two bodies. Much of this is of too technical a nature to include here. I need only explain that Mercury revolves about the Sun once in eighty-eight of our days. That is the length of its year. On August 10th it and the Earth were near inferior conjunction, *i. e.*, at their closest points to each other.

"The marauders came then! They have gone back now, for Mercury, moving faster in its orbit than does the Earth, is rapidly drawing away from us.

"But why did they come? Certainly not with friendly intentions! Nor yet with the boldness of an invasion—an attempted conquest. These were prowlers in the night, using every effort for secrecy. Abducting our women—our young girls. Again, that is an inescapable conclusion: they made no move, did nothing save for the purpose of abduction.

"A dozen young girls have vanished. The prowlers have gone, back into Interplanetary Space to Mercury or wherever they are native. The menace is over . . . *But is it?*

"We killed one of these men. And his companion, a strangely fantastic young girl with wings. She was a beautiful girl, no more than a child—in racial appearance no more like him than he was to an Earth-man. And, dying, she spoke English! That is indeed beyond all possible explanation by the deductions of our logical science. Even the wildest conjecture cannot encompass it.

"But we may imagine that she was not friendly to him and his fellows. A captive perhaps. With her dying breath she gasped something about warning us. Of what? Presumably the abduction of our women. And our imagination flings out—can there be so few women upon Mercury that the men must needs come to Earth to steal ours?

"Is the menace over? When the winged girl and the man were shot by our guards that night of August 17th at the White Camp, the gigantic figure of a man escaped into the forest. It seems impossible—with our aërial patrol, our multiplicity of watchers in the neighborhood—that one of the vehicles could have taken him away. We believe he is still on Earth. Every effort is being made to find him, but so far without success.

"Will the marauders come back—to rescue him, or to pursue their mysterious purpose? Can we believe that if the men of Mercury desire our women, the abductions are not to be planned upon a larger scale? Was this not a mere tentative foray to learn of conditions here?

"We believe just that! And when will the real attack be made? Mercury is speeding away from us now. Thousands, millions of miles are being added to the distance between it and the Earth. In eighty-eight days from August 10 last Mercury will have completed one revolution about the Sun. But during that time the Earth will have moved along a distance requiring twenty-eight days more for Mercury to overtake us.

"Therefore, during the first week of next December Mercury and the Earth will again be approaching inferior conjunction, again at their closest point to each other. At that time we may expect another attack! Undoubtedly it will be of far greater

proportions, menacing the safety of our women everywhere in the world!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ASCENT OF THE FLYING CUBE.

THIS was put into the press and on the air on August 31. I need not enlarge upon the public sensation it caused. Consternation, hysteria and ridicule, all intermingled. Then, within three days came a new sensation, more far-reaching, more astounding in what ultimately it was to disclose.

But at first it was merely an astronomical report. Technical, and hence undramatic. It caused almost no public comment.

On the nights of September 1, 2 and 3, several observatories in different parts of the world saw what seemed a tiny cylinder just outside the Earth's atmosphere. Observational conditions were favorable. The cylinder—if it were that—seemed to be circling the Earth like a satellite. But with each revolution it approached closer. By September 3 it began to skim the thin outer atmospheric stratum, and glowed faintly with friction-heat.

It was very small—too small for an interplanetary vehicle. Indeed, except for the extremely favorable conditions prevailing, it would not have been seen at all. The scientists concluded, after many observations, that it had approached the Earth at a tangent, propelled only by the inertia of its own velocity. If power it had once had, that power must have been exhausted. The attraction of the Earth had caught and held it, the combination of forces resulting in its becoming a tiny Earth satellite.

But the centrifugal force of its velocity was lessening. Already it had struck our atmosphere, the friction of which was slowing it down. The Earth was drawing it closer. In a few more revolutions, coming down into the denser air strata, the friction-heat would consume it.

Both Jimmy Turk and I were during these days in close connection with Dr. Grenfell and his associates. I had learned now for a fact what formerly had been only hearsay. For ten years, financed by the millionaire J. G. Bolton, the Bolton Society for Astronomical Research had been working to develop a practical means of conquering gravity. The problem was said to have been solved.

I learned now that in the southern New Jersey workshops of the Bolton Metal Industries, an interplanetary vehicle was ready for trial. Had this weird affair in Maine not transpired, the Bolton Space-ship might not have made its test flight until the following spring. The intention had been to try a voyage in the direction of the Moon. Possibly to land there, and hunt for evidence of what had become of Guy Palisse and his Moon-rocket of ten years ago.

The vehicle now had been rushed to completion. On the morning of September 4, Jimmy excitedly arrived with the news.

"I've persuaded Grenfell to let us in on this, Jack! We're going, you and I!"

"Going? Where?"

"In the Bolton vehicle. They've got it ready! Well, ready enough, anyway, for a short test flight. They're going out to try to get this cylinder that's circling the Earth. It has to be done at once—in a few more revolutions the thing will burn up."

We flew Jimmy's Dragon down to the Bolton plant that same day, where

in the center of the huge cluster of buildings stood the laboratories and workshop for the building of the vehicle. And among the busy and tensely excited scientists and mechanics here, we found the pale, calm Rowena Palisse.

She too was permitted to go on this test flight. I sat with her in one of the laboratory rooms where they were preparing the chemicals for the final charging of some of the Space-ship's batteries, while Jimmy hurried away to find out when we could go aboard and inspect it.

STRANGELY reticent girl, this Rowena Palisse! I told her so.

"Am I?" she mocked.

"I thought I knew you," I protested. "We talked for a good many hours and a good many different times at the White Camp. You never mentioned this Space-ship."

"Didn't I? It was held a secret, Jack."

"You're going on it?"

"Yes."

"You've known Dr. Grenfell for years? Somebody told me—"

"Yes. I have." She was amused. "All girls do not necessarily have to tell everything in their minds to every chance young man of their acquaintance."

I frowned, and at once she turned serious.

"When I was twelve years old, my brother—left me. I think, ever since then, I've been interested in astronomy—passionately so."

"Oh!"

A girl passionately interested in astronomy was something new to me. This was, indeed, a girl who in the midst of busy scientists did not seem out of place.

She added, "I studied under poor Professor White. He was teacher and father to me. And I've had some practical experience—I was one of the clockers of the last transit of Mercury. You see, even when I was a child, Dr. Grenfell promised me that some day he would take me to the Moon."

Her voice was slow, calm, but strangely intense. "I think I've been living for that—some day to get to the Moon . . . My brother—"

Jimmy dashed up. "Come on! They say we can look over the ship."

We followed Rowena, who seemed as much at home here as any of these goggled, gray-robed laboratory workers. We threaded a crowd in the inner yard and entered a square flat building with a bulging dome-roof which housed the vehicle. It stood on a concrete platform, raised a few feet above the level of the floor. Impressive, awe-inspiring thing: the first, the only one of its kind in the world. For a moment Rowena did not speak, but stood regarding us as Jimmy and I silently gazed at it.

In outward dimensions it was an exact cube, each of its faces fifty feet square—a great sugar-lump, girded with fantastic trappings. The upper face—the roof, so to speak—bulged convex with a dome-peak, as though upon the sugar-lump a little conical hat were set.

A low doorway with a thick bull's-eye pane was at the bottom of one face. There were round bull's-eye windows in tiers which indicated three stories in the interior. And girdling it near its middle, some twenty feet up, was a sort of outside balcony, or deck. Parallel with the base, this deck encircled all four sides. It was about ten feet wide, and eight feet high, entirely inclosed with metallic plates in which large cir-

cular windows were set like a row of portholes in an airplane cabin.

Such was the Flying Cube's outward aspect. It was of a dull-white aluminum color. The lights in the room glistened on it with a silver sheen.

"Well!" said Jimmy. He was speechless with awe. I turned and met Rowena's gaze. Her face was placid, calm, but her big blue eyes glowed with a fierce emotion more intense because it was suppressed.

"It is going to take me to the Moon, Jack—some day soon."

THE cube stood vibrationless. Yet somehow it seemed trembling to be away. Held here on Earth—but eager to be gone. Like the restless spirit of man, which had created it; ready to dare everything for the adventure, the conquest of the Unknown.

We entered the single lower doorway. I saw that the door was some two feet thick, with mechanical fastenings upon its inner side like the door to a bank vault. A few mechanics were inside; the shop outside rang with the hum of the last details for the trial trip which was to be made the following night.

No one paid any attention to us as we followed Rowena about the interior. I saw none of the mechanisms of the ship upon this visit, save in a cursory glance at the engine rooms and the banks of controls. Some time later, upon a far different flight than any one of us could now anticipate, Dr. Grenfell explained to me the fundamental operating principles and many of the working details.

Jimmy was not interested now—nor ever, for that matter. This Flying Cube was leaving to-morrow night to try and capture a little cylinder which was encircling the Earth. And he would be aboard; that was enough for him. His thoughts flew ahead, eager only to capture the cylinder. Twenty times he had asked me what I thought the cylinder actually was.

The interior of the cube was divided into three stories. The lower was merely a single, low-ceilinged metal room with several small rooms partitioned off on two of its sides—cubby-holes which were an electric galley, storerooms for food and miscellaneous supplies, and a lower control room.

The main room had somewhat the aspect of the small lounge of a dirigible gas-ship. In the center of its grid-floor was a large oval bull's-eye pane—a window gazing downward. There were small rugs, and rattan chairs and tables. A phonograph; books set in metal shelves; and tables with chess, checkers and cards.

To one side a narrow metal ladder, like a steep stairway, led upward. The second story had a single transverse corridor cutting it in half. It was fifty feet long; at each of its ends a door opened to the outer balcony-deck.

On each side of the corridor were four small doorways, giving access to as many rooms. Four of them were sleeping cabins, with windows and doors opening to the deck. The other four were instrument and mechanism rooms. Electric pumps for charging pressure tanks by which the pneumatic valves shifted the gravity plates; ventilators; chemical air-renewers; the heating and cooling system; interior air pressure and interior gravity controls; the lighting system. All small, compact mechanisms. Miracles of science; astounding tributes to man's inventive skill.

Most of them were here, though some were in the upper tier. We ascended the ladder from the dimly light-

ed corridor. The top story held a circular central room surrounded by small cubbyholes which were additional instrument and control rooms. A tiny circular staircase led upward into the interior of the dome-peak—a small observatory with an ultra-modern though not very large electro-telescope.

"WELL," said Jimmy again, "there's plenty to it. Compact, isn't it? Let's see the outer deck—we haven't been there yet."

We descended to the middle story; went out one of the corridor end-doors. The deck interior was somewhat less than ten feet wide and eight feet high. Entirely inclosed, it was like a narrow corridor.

Doors and windows at intervals opened into the second-tier rooms, and bull's-eye panes were set in a row along the outer wall. There were similar panes both in ceiling and floor; and the ceiling held a row of hooded light bulbs. There were small lounge chairs out here. The deck was fifty feet long on each side—two hundred feet in all, it girdled the cube, as the deck of a surface ship girdles its superstructure.

One of these fifty-foot stretches of deck differed from the other three. D-face, Rowena called this section. An exit-porte was here—a low, six-foot square room bolted outside the deck. It was an air-lock, in which the air pressure could be changed by pneumatic pumps and exhausts.

"For landing upon the Moon," said Rowena.

Along the deck here she showed us somewhat similar, though more complicated portes in which guns might be mounted and fired out into a different air-pressure, or even into the vacuum of Space.

We wandered about the Flying Cube for fully an hour that late afternoon, tremendously interested. Yet with what intensified emotion I would have made that inspection if I could have seen into the future! The weird, stirring events in which I was destined to participate within the narrow confines of those inclosing walls! On that narrow deck, at those pressure-portes—that air-lock!

At 10 P.M. on the evening of September 5 the Bolton Flying Cube left the Earth on its attempt to intercept the cylinder.

The orbit of this mysterious projectile—if projectile it was—had been calculated. It would approach from the west, passing over the middle of North America, and reaching the longitude of the Atlantic seaboard at about midnight.

Its altitude was now estimated to be about two hundred and fifty miles above the Earth's surface.

There were nine of us on board. Dr. Grenfell, with five assistants, and Jimmy, Rowena and myself. We three had no part in the details of this departure. There was nothing we could do. We stood together, in the dimness of one of the deck lengths, at a bull's-eye window. We were silent—words seemed inadequate. The cube had been resounding with the tramp of mechanics, but they had all left it now.

Jimmy glanced at his watch. "Nine fifty-five—we ought to be on our way soon."

ROWENA stood beside me. I felt the pressure of her hand on my arm, but she did not speak. The portes were all closed now, save the lower door. Then the mechanism of the ship came on. The hum of air-

circulating system; the pressure equalizers; the throb of the little pumps on the pressure-tanks of the plate-shifters; the hissing of the exhaust valves; and the low whine of the current in the magnetic gravity plates.

Through the deck window we could see the lighted interior of the workshop. The dome-roof was rolled back. The deep purple sky with blazing star-gems stretched overhead, waiting to receive us.

I heard Jimmy mutter, "Why the dickens don't we get going?"

The hum in the cube's interior grew louder. The hissing of the shifting-valves sounded. There was a slight quiver—a vibration of the deck-floor under my feet. I clutched suddenly at the heavy fastenings of the window. It was nothing, however; in a moment even the tiny vibration was gone.

But outside the window there was movement. The room dropping away. I caught a glimpse of the white emotion-swept faces of the men out there gazing up at us as we lifted.

Then there was the open roof of the building. The grounds about it; the high wall; a crowd of people and gathered vehicles outside the wall, for the news of our test ascension, however closely held, had spread to draw a thousand spectators.

Then there were trees and a starlit landscape. A few moments, with the feeling that I was upon the deck of a rapidly lifting airship. But only a few moments, for the landscape shrank amazingly. Concave at first, with the horizon a great upstanding rim, like the upper edge of a circular bowl with us near the bottom.

There were clusters of tiny lights to mark the villages far down. Moving lights along the roads—a passing airplane occasionally, but now far beneath us. Off to the west, I saw the line of seacoast. Starlight on the sea.

How long we stood there I do not know. I can't recall that any one of us spoke—even Jimmy was stricken into an awed silence. I became conscious that I was intolerably, suffocatingly hot.

The landscape was a landscape no longer! A surface. The surface of the Earth. Cloud-banks were visible. But we were high above them, up in the starlight.

I saw with a sudden thrill of awe that the surface was convex! A great upward-bulging curved surface beneath me. Shrunken, map-like contours of land and water, mottled with cloud-areas.

The Earth! But I was no longer part of it!

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS CYLINDER.

A STEP sounded behind us. It was one of Grenfell's assistants, a man named Baker.

"Come up. Dr. Grenfell thought you'd like to know that the cylinder is visible."

We ascended to the upper tier. Dr. Grenfell was alone in the observatory dome. Baker rejoined one of his fellows in the near-by control room. The other men were dispersed at their posts about the cube.

I realized again how intolerably hot it was from the friction-heat of our rapid upward passage through the atmosphere. Dr. Grenfell sat hunched over the telescope. He was coatless and collarless, his sleeves rolled up exposing his thick muscular forearms, mottled with dark hair wet now with sweat.

There was barely room for us all in the dome-chamber. Through the circular overhead pane the star-field blazed in an almost dead-black sky. A new glory to the stars—amazingly steady, amazingly brilliant.

"Hot, isn't it?" Grenfell greeted us. "Have the cooling system on full. It will be better presently. We've stopped ascending—the atmosphere is very rare here—little friction now."

His gaze fell on the quiet, intent Rowena. "Child, didn't I tell you this cube would be successful? Didn't I?"

He was triumphant. The test ascent was a success. The cube was controllable—the secret of interplanetary flight had been conquered! Strange, but in all my awe at this new experience, never once had I thought of that.

And Jimmy was only concerned with the oncoming cylinder.

"Where is it, doctor?" he demanded. "I don't see it."

Through the small telescope it was visible off to the west where the Pacific slopes of the Rocky Mountains showed, with the snow on their higher peaks still brightened by the fading sunlight.

The cylinder was a faint luminous dot. We hung poised and the dot grew, took form. And suddenly I realized that it was quite close to us. Perhaps we were moving along with it. I do not know. But it seemed approaching at a leisurely rate. At first I could not guess its size, or its distance—the one factor dependent upon the other, and nothing with which to compare either of them. A glowing, silver-white, bullet-shaped projectile. It sailed majestically along, heated luminous, with a faint trail of light-fire like a fan-tail behind it—gases from its heated metal burning faintly in this rarefied air.

We could soon see it plainly without the telescope. Greenfell spoke into a telephone mouthpiece.

"Baker? Raise us slightly. Can you see it? Close now. Swing D-face westward, if you can. A little—not much!"

Through the silent, vibrationless interior of the cube Baker's signal-gongs were ringing; and we could hear the hiss of the plate-shifter valves.

The electronic rocket streams were cut off now. The gravity plates were shifted; and our turning was aided by the streams of etheric pressure-vibrations darting from each corner of the cube like streams from a pinwheel. As we swung the vault of the heavens moved around in a slow twist—then steadied.

GRENFELL'S voice was hurried, tense. "Dean, you and Turk go down to the deck, on D-face. Stand by the exit-porte. I can only spare Gibbons for down there. You can help him with the manual locks. I don't dare trust the automatics. We'll have the thing aboard in a few minutes—if we're lucky. Rowena, child, you stay with me."

The cylinder seemed no more than half a mile away now. It was much closer when in a minute or so we gazed at it again from the deck bull's-eye window.

The man Gibbons stood by a series of hand-levers that operated the pressure doors of the lock-chamber. Its inner deck-door was closing as we arrived.

The pane was of massive glassite, transparent. Through it the interior of the little lock-room projecting out from the deck was visible. The outer door-slide was closed.

Gibbons shifted a lever. "Hold that, will you?"

I held it, and he bent and opened a valve-cock. The outer door of the lock slid open—an aperture six feet wide and five feet high opening into the empty realms of Space. The air in the lock chamber, which had been under a pressure of one atmosphere like the rest of the cube's interior, went out with a rush. The hiss and surge of it were audible with the first widening slit of the outer door.

No wonder care was needed in the handling of these controls, being operated now for the first time! If we should let this inner slide open, all the air in the cube would rush out in a tornado-blast! And we would be sucked out with it! There was a heavy iron wrench which had been lying neglected on the floor of the lock. It went out like a wind-blown feather when the outer slide opened.

The glowing cylinder slowly approached. I judged it now to be no more than two or three feet long. It came point toward us. Silent, dramatic meeting—our poised cube and this wandering projectile! Up in the starlight with the blazing firmament above and the Earth spread like a gigantic convex relief-map beneath us.

I knew that Dr. Grenfell was endeavoring to hold us so that the cylinder might fall into the open outer door-slide of the lock-chamber. It needed several trials. The men were inexperienced as yet in handling the cube.

We missed it completely at the first trial. It seemed to waver with the attraction of our greater mass. We circled it several times. The disturbance we caused made it begin to rotate end over end upon an axis of its own creation. And with forward velocity destroyed it began sinking toward the Earth.

Then at last we moved at it diagonally from above. A true aim this time. It settled through the yawning open porte and fell upon the metal floor of the lock chamber, to lie there with a fading glow as instantly it began to cool.

Gibbons flung the outer slide closed. Dr. Grenfell triumphantly joined us on the deck, and Rowena with him. The other men arrived. The controls of the cube were set-locked. We were sinking very slowly back to Earth—so slowly it would take hours to reach the lower atmospheric strata.

"No hurry," said Grenfell. "Don't let the pressure in yet—let it cool slowly."

It lay on the floor of the lock, apparently undamaged, though its metallic outer shell was fused, pitted and scarred by the friction-heat. It was a small affair, not much over two feet long.

"Now, Gibbons—easy at first. Don't be rash."

Opened pressure-valves began admitting the cube's air pressure into the near-vacuum of the lock's interior. They hissed and sizzled, and after a moment Gibbons turned them full. The cylinder stirred, rolled and bumped against the lock-wall.

In five minutes the inner door-slide was opened. A last rush of wind-pressure sucked at me as I stood near by.

Gibbons and Jimmy bent and entered the lock, to come out, gingerly carrying the prize.

"Not heavy," said Jimmy. "Thirty or forty pounds."

Our gravity-equalizers in the inner shell-floor of the cube's base were set to give us a gravity-pull normal to Earth. The cylinder had an Earth-weight of some forty pounds.

Jimmy and Gibbons laid it on the deck.

"HOLLOW," said Jimmy. He tapped it with his knuckles.

But Grenfell stopped him with a sharp command. "Don't do that! Want to blow us up?"

I had not thought of that! This could so easily be a bomb—a strange, deadly missile aimed at the Earth!

Jimmy leaped back as though the thing had stung him. Unreasonably, ludicrously I took a step away and drew Rowena with me. As if that could help us!

"Don't touch it!" cautioned Grenfell. "Rance, look it over."

Rance, I learned later, was head of the so-called bomb squad of New York. An expert in dealing with "infernal machines." He bent over the cylinder. Under the light of his flash he ran careful, practiced fingers along its pitted sides. Suddenly he straightened.

"Grenfell, look here. Something written—etched in the metal."

Scrawled, hand-written words, burned away in places. Almost illegible, but not quite! Three words:

FROM GUY PALISSE

As Grenfell uttered them, there came a cry behind me.

"From Guy—"

Rowena stood trembling, her face white as chalk with the blood draining from it.

"Guy! Oh—if he is alive! If only—alive—"

I thought she would fall. My arm went about her, but she pushed me away.

"I'm—not so silly, Jack." She even mustered a smile. "From Guy! Why, then, he must be alive. He must be alive!"

We carried the cylinder down to the lounge-room of the cube's lower tier and gathered over it. Rance showed us its series of small vents through which some chemical charge giving etheric wave-pressure had propelled it by a rocket principle through Space.

"Open it!" Jimmy urged impatiently. "Can't you open it?"

Then Rance located the lever, embedded in the burned metal, by which presumably some hidden slide would move. But the lever was fused solid; the cracks of the slide were barely discernible along the scarred metal surface.

But at last we got it open. The interior was a series of compartments holding the operating mechanism. But there was one packed with a thick layer of what seemed a strange form of paper. A hundred or more sheets, covered with handwriting burned into them with a faint tracery of black hairlines.

Dr. Grenfell seized them, carried them to a light, riffled through them.

"From Guy! He's alive! It was not the Moon he reached, but Mercury! He's alive!"

Fully half the sheets contained astronomical data, technical notes and diagrams. But the rest held a message from Guy Palisse. A message and a warning to us of Earth!

We sat there in the lounge room of the cube, listening breathlessly while Dr. Grenfell read from the pages. They were all fully legible. How well this strange narrative fitted into the weird events in Maine through which we had just passed! How much, inexplicable to us, was now explained!

And as I listened, I forgot this dim interior of the Bolton Flying Cube, hanging in Space high above the Earth's surface. Forgot Rowena sit-

ting white-faced and tense beside me, with her hand gripping my forearm. My thoughts conjured the naked, rain-swept copper hills of a strange planet.

CHAPTER V.

THE WARNING FROM MERCURY.

I AM Guy Palisse (the message began). Ten years ago—I suppose it must be that long—I left the Earth in what popularly was called a Moon-rocket. Any scientific institution will know of me. Whoever finds this message, I beg you to turn it over at once to some recognized scientific society.

Particularly I want this to be delivered to the Bolton Society for Astronomical Research, in New York City of the United States of America. Dr. Norton Grenfell will remember me. And I want my dear sister notified that I am alive. Her name is Rowena Palisse. I left her in care of Professor and Mrs. James White. They can be located in New York. Or, during the summer months, at the White Summer Camp for Girls, near Quogg, Maine.

I am preparing this quickly, unexpectedly. At first I thought I would use my cylinder to send an appeal for help, because we have been in trouble here. But just as I was ready to start the writing of this message I have learned strange terrible things which far outweigh our own personal trouble. The Earth is menaced! Earth's women—particularly the young girls—are in deadly danger! Here on Mercury these young girls of the Light Country whom I am vainly trying to aid have unwittingly been the partial cause of the menace threatening the girls of Earth. And we learned it a few hours ago.

So my message is a warning! I pray it may reach you in time.

I fear that I cannot leave Mercury, though I may perhaps make the effort. My rocket is demolished. A week ago I would have said that there was no interplanetary vehicle on Mercury. I know now that there is one! But I have not access to it.

I want to give you a picture of what is here—what has happened to me. These two worlds, the Earth and Mercury, so many million miles apart, are now strangely linked with crossing, interwoven destinies! When you understand conditions and events here, the menace threatening you will be clearer—you will know better how to deal with it.

I have no time to write in terms you would wholly comprehend. So I must leave much to your imagination.

Ten years I have been here. Until the recent crisis—the whirl of events which I will try now to sketch for you—I had taken my place among the people of the Hill City, capital of what is called the Light Country. They thought I was a god, miraculously appearing from the heavens. But the scientists, the learned men, the government, soon accepted me for what I am.

As you know, my age was eighteen when I left the earth. I am about twenty-eight now. Time seems different here. I have lost count of Earth-days, months and years. There are no days and nights in the Light Country. It is in a zone of half-light. Always the same brightness, except for the weather.

There is generally a pall of gray cloud masses overhead. But occasionally there are the black storms, when we have inky night such as there sometimes is on earth. Fearsome things, these black storms. They last

the extent of two or three Earth-days. Sometimes longer. I shall have much to say of one of them; it has played so large a part in the events which have brought us now into these dire straits.

MY life for the first years was quiet in the Hill City. I worked for the government, as does every one. The men of learning were much interested in what I had to say of Earth. I taught them English. They learned it readily, with their curiously retentive minds, capable of learning far more quickly than is normal to us of Earth.

I told them all I could of our civilization, our science, our weapons of war. And finally I was installed in the government laboratories. They were very primitive at first. But I helped make them less so. My rocket was smashed. I have worked to reconstruct it; and to devise other methods of gravity nullification. And I planned and built a projectile-cylinder by which I might communicate with Earth.

Slow, patient work, for ten years. The laboratories were established in subterranean rooms beneath the palace of the ruler of the Light Country.

I must be brief; there seems so much to tell you! I can give you so inadequate a picture. Around the Hill City is a barren waste of metallic coppery hills. Jagged spires. Cañons like gashes filed by some Titan metal-worker in mountains of metal. Bleak landscape! For leagues there is no blade of vegetation. No soil, save a metallic dust, worn by the rain and wind. Pools of water from the rain lie glistening in all the hollows.

A landscape fantastic. It looks like nothing of Earth, nor of the Moon.

This is the Light Country, the best region of Mercury. It is not all quite so forbidding. There are oases—valleys where rock which was not metallic has been worn into a soil. In them, with the abundant rainfall, and the heavy humid heat, there is always a luxuriant, tropical vegetation. Great spindly shafts of trees, flimsy and porous, and air vines, with giant, spreading leaves and vivid, exotic flowers. Quite a contrast to the naked copper hills!

In such a valley the capital, the Hill City, was built. It occupies the bottom and the inner sides of a huge bowl-like depression in the great metal plateau surrounding it. The level floor is perhaps five miles across.

The level streets, tree-lined, are really roads rather than streets. There is no congestion of houses. Fertile fields of soil lie around the homes—each tilled by its controller. The low houses are built of the prevalent copper. There are gardens, trees, and always a profusion of brilliant flowers.

The outskirts of the city lie upon the surrounding inner slopes of the bowl. Boulevards, like concentric rings, circle the fifteen-mile area. And there are other streets running like spokes of a wheel from the valley floor up to the thousand-foot height of the upper circular rim. And an artificial reservoir-lake is beside the palace, in the center of the valley floor.

Such is the Hill City. Its people, inhabitants of this Light Country zone, are generally smaller than Earth people. The men average perhaps five feet. They are often heavy-set, squat fellows, with wide shoulders and thick chests, but of lesser strength than an Earth-man, so that though the gravity here is something less than half that of Earth, they move about much as you do.

But it is not so with me here! On

Earth I weigh about a hundred and forty pounds. That is seventy pounds or less, here on Mercury. I can run with twelve-foot strides, and leap some thirty or forty feet. The Mercutian men were afraid of me at first, but they are used to it now.

I SHALL never forget my first meeting with Tama. Like all Mercutian women she is winged with those sleek feathered wings which are the cause now of our disaster.

I am not one to attempt an explanation of the purpose of an all-wise Creator in thus endowing the females of this world. I think perhaps there is a logical justice to it. The male is created to pursue, to capture, to enslave the female. At least, it was so on Earth throughout the history of mankind.

But the women here are by nature given the means to be free. They are slight of body, small in stature—I suppose an average height at maturity would be four feet six inches—with a Mercutian weight of forty pounds or less. Winged from the shoulder with a ten-foot spread, they fly like an albatross.

They are free by nature. But man could not let it rest like that. At marriage, to insure submission to the will of her husband, the wings are clipped so that she may no longer fly. A cruel mutilation, an intolerable humiliation.

But for generations the virgins at marriage were forced to it, in surrender to man's conceit, the masculine desire for physical superiority and dominance. The virgins submitted, but always with a smoldering rebellion. I sensed that even when I first came here—a growing rebellion on the part of the women against this mutilation.

It was always unexpressed. But I saw, with the passing years, how it was growing constantly stronger; a smoldering hate against this man-made law. A few of the young men, perhaps, were always in sympathy with the virgins. But not one had ever dared publicly proclaim that he wanted to take for mate a woman with wings unclipped. I suppose it was partly personal pride—the fear of ridicule from other men; and partly because the laws of the country made such a union illegal, its parties moral outlaws, and its children illegitimate, to be put to death unless the mother's wings were clipped.

The rebelliousness of the virgins intensified for generations. Then, just about a year ago, a leader arose to fire them into deeds—a young virgin, inspired with the desire to right this wrong.

A Joan of Arc? A warrior? Ah, yes, I have already seen her as that. And destined to be a martyr? I pray God it may not be so.

This leader is Tama. I met her first a year ago. She was then about twenty years old. I think I loved her from the beginning, though we have never spoken of love. From the moment I met her, she was obviously one who fought against the possibility of love, because to her it represented mutilation.

There were always men who wanted her in marriage. Roc was one of them, a young Mercutian newly risen to power in the Hill City Government. A sort of captain of the army, and chief of police—it is all one here.

ROC hated me from the first—and the hate was mutual. But I taught him English, and for years answered all his avid questions concerning our Earth.

I wish that I had not. And I wish that I

had had the curiosity to inquire more closely into Roc's personal history. He never spoke of his family. But there were tales concerning him. I understood vaguely that some fifteen years ago—five years before I reached here—Roc's father had lived in the Hill City. They said he was a gigantic fellow, named Croat; a clever man, versed in science, but an unscrupulous scoundrel.

Roc was only a boy at the time his father Croat tried to seize the Light Country Government. Roc's father raised an army. It contained all the criminals at hand; adventurers; and slaves of the barbarous Cold Country, that rims the dark side of the planet.

But Croat was defeated. Sent away into exile. It was said he was still living in the Cold Country—a leader among those benighted ignorant savages, and surrounded by all the other criminals who have been banished from the Light Country.

The boy Roc remained in the Hill City, and in these passing years rose to a position of trust in the Hill City Government. He never spoke of his father. How could we know that they were secretly meeting? Slowly, carefully they were planning this thing which has now burst upon us; but no one ever guessed that the crafty Roc was always merely a tool of the unseen, almost forgotten rebel Croat!

I taught Tama English—and taught it to Toh, her twin brother, so that now they speak it fluently. I told them about our Earth. And I recall how Tama very strangely smiled at me.

"It seems to me, Guy, that the women of your world have had a history and a struggle not so very different from ours."

I come now to that momentous night just a short time ago when Tama told me her purpose; and with her brother Toh I became embroiled in the tumultuous events destined so quickly to sweep us into desperate plight. And now they force me to send this warning to you of Earth.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Wisdom of the Gull

SCIENTIFICALLY speaking, sea gulls do not possess the power to think or reason. To any one, however, who has watched them when the tide is out, their actions often point to a fairly well-developed power of thinking. The method the bird uses in getting to the soft, fleshy parts of the body of a clam, which is covered by the hard shell, is a good example. There are many clams left by clam-diggers above the surface of the sand, helplessly exposed to the gulls which follow in the clam-diggers' wake. Swooping down the gull lifts the clam, shell and all, in its beak; carries it to a considerable height; watches when it comes above a large rock, and drops the clam, breaking the shell and exposing the meat. Swooping down again to reach the clam almost at the instant it strikes the rock to insure its getting there before other gulls, the bird has its feast and continues looking for more clams. This practice of gulls has been the cause of large quantities of clam shells collecting on the roofs of large, flat-roofed buildings which are not at a great distance from the beach. *Raymond A. Wohlrabe.*

"You look as though you'd like to eat me," she laughed

The British Blonde

Press agent and cheerful grafter Bill Peepe nurses a tiny romance into an octopus of Hollywood scandal—only to find himself holding down a couple of the tentacles

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Legacy of Peril," "The Man of Gold," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

MR. PEEPE "GOES HOLLYWOOD."

OLD BILL PEEPE gazed at himself in the mirror of the hall bedroom which he occupied in a rooming house in West Fifty-Fifth Street in the well-known and not too popular city of New York.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Peepe. "You would, would you?"

Seizing a white hair just above his left temple between thumb and forefinger, he yanked it from his head.

"Prematurely gray," sighed Mr. Peepe. "Thirty-five years old and gray hairs. It can't be the hard work, so it must be the liquor. William, you are growing ancient. As a grasshopper you have been a success, but winter comes. Turn yourself into an ant and lay away forage for the future."

He went to his window and looked down upon an array of sordid and disreputable back yards beyond which a brick block, even more seedy than the one in which he lived, displayed its repulsive rear. At a window on the third floor of this block stood a young woman in a gaudy Chinese kimono and suspiciously yellow hair. Bill's eye brightened and then dulled.

"Farewell, New York," he chanted. "And yellow-haired spirit of New York, farewell! Say good-by to Old Bill Peepe. He goes where mazuma waits him."

After this touch of sentiment Mr. Peepe finished dressing and went down to the telephone in the front hall. He gave the operator a number.

"Let me speak to Mr. Mandelbaum, please," he said. "None other than William Peepe is on the line."

"Izzy," he said presently. "Ole Bill. Listen. I've turned down jobs with Al Woods and Dave Belasco. I snapped my fingers in Jed Harris's face. I'm wrenching myself away from the big town which I helped to make a big town. I'll go to Hollywood. I'll bury myself in the sticks. I'll exploit the celluloid on the terms you mention and I'll be down later to collect my transportation and expenses. How's that?"

"I was just going to hire another feller," replied Mr. Mandelbaum. "Last night you said you'd never leave New York no matter how much I paid you."

"I've reconsidered, Izzy," declared Mr. Peepe. "I've decided to sell myself for gold. I'm a reformed character, Izzy. No more red licker. I'm going to drop all my habits at the Grand Central Station."

"You'd better. I know what a chance I'm taking on you," sighed Mr. Mandelbaum. "But if you think you're going to loaf all the way to Hollywood, you're crazy. You go out on the same train with Lura Leeds and you get her some publicity on the way."

"Why not?" returned William. "I work while others sleep."

THE Twentieth Century Limited had been two hours on its way toward Chicago when William Peepe knocked politely upon the door of the compartment occupied by Lura Leeds.

"Come in, if you must," sighed a rich, luscious British voice, redolent of the fogs, the mists, and maybe the roses of old England. "Oh it's you, Mr. Peepe."

"None other," replied William as he entered and closed the door behind him.

"Mr. Mandelbaum said you were

my counsel of public relations," remarked the young woman. "Exactly what is that in plain English, and why must I have one?"

William seated himself, crossed one leg, being careful to draw up the new and nobby trousers, and inspected the lovely creature who sat opposite him.

In the opinion of Old Bill Peepe there was no such thing as a British beauty. If an English girl had lovely eyes she had wide nostrils. If she had a good forehead she had a chin like a prize fighter. If her nose was straight she had a scrawny neck. If her complexion was peaches-and-cream she had big feet. If her figure was excellent she had a face like a horse. And if in every other respect she was perfect she was sure to display, when she smiled, a mouthful of crooked or false teeth.

Mr. Peepe's impressions had been formed by actresses and chorus girls whom he had met, not by extensive travel in the British Isles. And as he gazed at Lura Leeds he was unable to believe that she was a simon-pure Britisher. She was obviously a fake because she was obviously a perfect beauty.

The girl was positively astounding. Her hair was pure gold, her skin was as incredible as a complexion expert's claims, her features were classic, her figure would have won her the crown of Miss America had she been eligible. Her feet were tiny, and her smile was positively radiant. Such teeth! Pearls of great price, regular as sunlight. From top to toe she was like the hopelessly perfect vision of a hashish eater. Loveliness incorporated.

"You look as though you would like to eat me," said Miss Leeds, who revealed a dimple in each cheek and one in her chin.

"Reach for a Lucky," replied Bill, pulling out his cigarette case. The remainder of the quotation was evidently unknown to her. "You wouldn't make a bad meal," he assured her. "Now, a counsel of public relations is boloney for 'press agent.' I suppose you know what that is?"

"Something to do with the newspapers?" she asked.

"Something to do *to* the newspapers. Mr. Mandelbaum, who used to be a great pal of mine when we both worked for Al Woods, has engaged you at a princely salary to appear in the talkies. Now you probably had the king tying your shoes in dear ole Lunnun, but nobody ever heard of you over here. So it's up to me to make you popular in the U. S. A."

LURA LEEDS was listening dreamily. "That's very kind of you, I'm sure."

"Humph! I suppose it would be expecting too much of you to find a sense of humor concealed about the premises?"

Miss Leeds laughed sweetly. "I find you very diverting if that's what you mean."

"It's not. I'm not supposed to be comical. The idea is this, beautiful: you keep your exquisite mouth shut and stand for anything I feel is worth while doing."

"And what do you intend to do, please?"

"This," said Bill, and leaning forward he endeavored to plant a kiss upon a rosebud mouth.

Whang!

An amazingly strong hand left the imprint of five fingers upon the sallow cheek of Mr. Peepe, and he registered chagrin and renunciation.

"All in fun," he murmured. "Now

as I understand it, you were going to marry the Prince of Wales but decided, instead, upon a career in pictures."

"Don't be absurd," she retorted. "I never met his highness."

"Well, you've got a few dukes up your sleeve."

"Not one."

"Oh, yes, you have! The Duke of Weymouth is going to bust in here just before we get to Albany, and try to persuade you to wed him. You'll scream for help and the train crew and myself will chuck him off the train at Albany."

Miss Leeds chuckled prettily. "On the contrary, I should accept him. I would much prefer being a duchess to a film star."

"He's phony, kid. A ham actor I've hired."

"Oh!" said Miss. Leeds. "In that case, I'll scream."

"Well," said Bill. "That's stunt number one. There won't be a dull moment on this trip, flower of England."

Miss Leeds opened a pretty red mouth and yawned.

"It's dull now," she observed. "Egotists always bore me."

"Personally," said Bill, rising at the hint, "I hate prudes. Don't lock your door, and yell your loudest."

HE withdrew to the smoking car and inspected eagerly the array of smokers. After some consideration he decided that a young man who was using a cigarette holder would do. He was an attractive young man, if you liked a strictly Anglo-Saxon type, which Bill did not. His clothes were what is known as tweeds and they only fitted him approximately. He had a solid jaw, a pair of guileless blue eyes and he wore spats. For the purposes of Mr. Peepe, this Englishman must have bought his ticket just to be obliging. At that moment the Englishman pressed a button, and the white-coated porter appeared as if by magic.

"I say," ordered the young man, "I know you have prohibition over heah, but fetch me some sort of cold drink if you don't mind."

Hearing that accent, Mr. Peepe hesitated no longer. Seating himself at the desk in the corner of the car he wrote a little note in a distinctly feminine hand. He looked at his watch. Twenty minutes to Albany. Ten minutes would do the trick, no more, no less. That an innocent young foreigner would be ejected from a train upon which he had purchased a ticket didn't worry Mr. Peepe. It would only serve him right for being a masher.

In ten minutes the porter again approached the Britisher and offered him a little note, which the young man accepted with obvious astonishment. His eyes widened as he read and a flush of pleasure mantled his fair cheek.

> I'm in drawing-room C in car 221 and I'm finding it dull. I saw you pass under my window and I thought you might be finding the trip dull. You are English, if I am not mistaken, and you probably have heard of me. Just tap on my door.
>
> LURA LEEDS.

The young man looked around in a guilty manner and then thrust the note into his breast pocket. After thriftily finishing his ginger ale, he rose nonchalantly and strolled forward. Mr. Peepe dogged his footsteps.

Two cars forward he tapped upon the door of drawing-room C, and then entered. William drew near and waited in the corridor. The train was pulling into the station at Albany. A minute passed. Two minutes, three

minutes. The scream of mortal terror —where was it? Another minute passed. Lura would have to hurry, or the train would pull out and they couldn't chuck the man off without killing him . . . Bill decided to pretend he had heard her scream.

Grasping the doorknob, he thrust open the door and plunged into the drawing-room. The stranger was standing up and bending to light a cigarette for the film star.

"How dare you force your way into this compartment and insult this lady?" shouted William Peepe. "Get out of here, you scoundrel!"

The Englishman turned and stared at him blankly. Miss Leeds emitted a soft throaty chuckle.

"This person is employed by the company to secure paragraphs in the American newspapers for me," she explained. "I forget his name. Young man, this is an old friend of mine, Lord Cheltworth. By a curious coincidence he happened to be on the train and, hearing that I was aboard, came to call on me."

"Yeah?" sneered Bill. "Off he goes just the same. I can prove he didn't know who you were and just barged in. Lord Cheltworth? Huh!"

"Lura, shall I eject the rascal?" asked the Englishman in a voice of deadly calm.

"Why not?" queried the beautiful girl.

Before Mr. Peepe could defend himself, he was grasped by collar and the slack of the trousers, rushed through the corridor, out on the car platform and, just as the porter was about to close the vestibule door, he was lifted into space and dropped with a thud upon the station platform. The train rolled by him with increasing momentum. He could have swung himself aboard, save that the vestibule doors were all closed. He saw the observation car sweep past and he shook his fist at the train to the amusement of several young people upon the platform.

Mr. Peepe rose, brushed himself off, ignored the questions of several redcaps and moved toward the station. A slow smile spread across his homely features. Ideas were still flowing normally.

About a quarter of an hour later Mr. Peepe was in the office of the Albany *News* turning over the pages of "Burke's Peerage." The volume was five or six years old, but Lord Cheltworth was in it. Bill muttered:

"Cheltworth, family name of the earls of Glandmore. Present earl—the deuce with him—Ernest, eldest son, title Lord Cheltworth, born 1901, married 1924 to Hon. Eleanore Glencashion, born 1905, daughter of Duke of Moultburg. Issue, Harold, born 1925; Clara, born 1926."

Into the eye of Mr. William Peepe came a glitter of satisfaction. He wasn't going to lose his job. In his pocket was his transportation. He could take the next train and still connect with the transcontinental limited at Chicago.

CHAPTER II.

A THOUSAND FRONT PAGES.

A MAN may be down, but down isn't out. From defeat, victory. Here he had been about to work an ancient gag which nine editors out of ten would greet with a horse laugh, when the luck of Old Bill Peepe had jumped to his assistance and given him a story that would make the front page of every rag in the U. S. A.

Lura Leeds, the beautiful blond vamp of England—he visualized it in big type—is only twenty-four hours in America when she scores heavily. Lord Cheltworth, heir to the title of the earldom of Glandmore, is so infatuated with the newest Hollywood film star that he pursues her across the Atlantic, catches up with her upon the Twentieth Century Limited, and crosses half a dozen State lines in a drawing-room with his inamorata. The tragedy is that the bewitched young nobleman has abandoned a beautiful young wife, daughter of a duchess, and two lovely young children named Harold and Clara, thereby giving the British aristocracy a sock below the belt.

"Wow, what a story! And Old Bill Peepe only a few hours on the job!"

He went to an idle typewriter and began to beat out the yarn after inserting half a dozen yellow sheets and five carbons in his machine. In half an hour he had half a column of perfectly elegant scandal. What he lacked in truth he made up with insinuation. He read it with a glow of pride and then he tried it on the dog, meaning the whiskered city editor of the Albany newspaper.

"Can you prove it?" demanded the canny newspaper man.

"Shoot a wire to Syracuse to find out if they are both on the train."

"It's a morning paper story," said the editor. "I'll have time to do that little thing."

"Where will I find the Consolidated News man?" asked Bill. "This goes on the wires, of course."

"Room 222 in this building. Some yarn, Mr. Peepe."

"Not bad for a beginning," he replied modestly. "The trouble with the movies is that they've never had a live-wire press agent before. After I've been in Hollywood a month they won't know the place."

TWO hours later Bill was again on a train for Chicago. He smoked a cigar in serene contentment.

Mr. Peepe had no conscience worthy of the name. That he had blackened the reputation of a presumably pure young girl didn't disturb him, nor that he had probably broken up the home of an estimable young nobleman. Bill had a faculty for believing his own stories. He had already forgotten that Lord Cheltworth was lured to the drawing-room by Bill's own machinations, and that Lura Leeds didn't know that an old acquaintance was on the train until Peepe had thrust him upon her.

All he had in mind was that the morning papers would give his star front page attention which she needed, and the Mandelbaum office would realize that they had hired a man who had the goods.

The new job had been a godsend. The show business was terrible, and there had been nothing in sight when he bumped into Izzy Mandelbaum on Broadway. Izzy and he had been, respectively, company manager and advance man of divers attractions ten years before, but Izzy had busted into films and become a big producer, while Bill Peepe had labored on to save a dying industry.

In his pocket was the sum of four hundred dollars, two weeks' salary in advance. Some of the film publicity men made fifty thousand a year, and there was a bright future for Old Bill Peepe. Ah, well—it was time the tide turned for the best and least-appreciated press agent in the show business.

The extra fare train for Los Angeles left Chicago at 8.30 P.M., and the train

from the East bearing William rolled into Chicago about five.

He had picked up Chicago morning papers in Indiana stations and had been pleased to observe that the pursuit of Lura Leeds by Lord Cheltworth across one ocean and one continent got the attention it deserved. A bath at a hotel, a good dinner with a bottle of red wine, and Bill wended his way to the train in a blithe mood. The time when he should meet his victims did not give him the slightest uneasiness. The heck with them! He was working for Old Bill Peepe.

A telegraph messenger boy stood at the train entrance calling out names, and one of them was William Peepe.

Bill accepted a thick yellow envelope and grinned as he opened it. Izzy was so rich that he treated the telegraph as though it were the mails and rarely wrote less than two or three hundred words, in which he patterned himself after Flo Ziegfeld. It began:

I ought to have known better than to hire a bum and a low-life for a press agent. You're fired, you scut, and you better keep out of my way for the rest of your life.

Here I hire a beautiful English girl right out of a convent, or anyway the London Gayety, and I want her to have some fine high-class publicity and right away you start to blacken her character, you drunken rat. I hired her to play ingénues, not vampires, and an ingénue has got to be pure as the driven snow, you sap. You can't even pin too much scandal on vamps, you souse, you!

Already the Hays office is on my neck for bringing over a dissolute woman from England when we have plenty in pictures now. Besides, the papers are going to be sued for millions, you crook, since Lord Cheltworth ain't left his wife and kids, but is in London at this minute. It's Lord Arthur Cheltworth, his brother, that is on the train, who is a bachelor and can chase dames round the world if he wants to. And it's a dirty lie that Lura vamped him into following her for the reason that she is my *fiancée*—or why should I give her a contract at big money?

You should send me back the unused portion of your ticket and the two weeks' salary that you got out of me by pretending to know your business. Anyhow, out in the street for you, and I hope you starve to death.

With dismay Bill Peepe read this outrageously unappreciative telegram from the man whose star he had planted upon a thousand front pages. The cold wind swept through the station and he shivered. Hollywood and its warm sunshine became exceedingly attractive, now that his prospects of residing there grew dim.

It was the girl's fault for introducing the man as Lord Cheltworth when she ought to have said Lord Arthur Cheltworth. Bill understood the distinctions in British titles when they were called to his attention. And Cheltworth had it coming to him, because he had no right to do more than chuck Bill out of the drawing-room. Dumping him off the train was carrying a joke too far.

Send back the cash and the transportation to Mandelbaum? Huh! By heck, he had money and a ticket to Hollywood and a reservation on this train. Lots of jobs out there and good men were scarce. Bill tore the libelous telegram into a thousand small pieces, squared his shoulders and marched down to his car. Hollywood, ho!

ABOUT three nights and two days later the Chief rolled into the Santa Fe depot at Los Angeles, and Old Bill Peepe descended from his car in an indigo mood. During the

journey he had not set eyes upon Lura Leeds because she had remained in her drawing-room and had all her meals served there, and because he had done the same in the compartment of a man named Joyce whose skill at poker was so remarkable as almost to be suspicious.

Mr. Joyce had plenty of good liquor, and he had been very liberal with it to Bill and three or four other victims he had picked up on the train. When the train reached Los Angeles, Joyce had in his possession some three hundred and eighty-odd dollars out of Mr. Peepe's four hundred. After tipping, *et cetera*, Bill landed in the city of the Angels with the sum of eight dollars and forty cents between him and absolute penury.

However, a pleasant time had been enjoyed by all, and he had a wardrobe trunk and several bags which were good for at least two weeks' board and lodgings at a hotel. As it was unlikely that he would be able to meet the hotel bill at the end of that time, Mr. Peepe selected the biggest and finest hotel in town so as to get the most value for the luggage he would have to leave, eventually, on its hands.

Los Angeles was a strange pasture to him. In the good old days no first-class press agent would take a job with a show which was going all the way to the coast, therefore Bill had no friends on the newspapers in this city who would tell him what to do and loan him the much needed filthy lucre from their slim wallets.

As he walked up the platform he heard the strains of a brass band and saw a crowd of people cheering. He drew near and was able to read what was written upon a big banner which two strong men were waving:

"Mandelbaum Inc. welcomes to Hollywood the great English star LURA LEEDS!"

That was what he read. With a grunt of disgust Old Bill Peepe moved off rapidly.

CHAPTER III.

A LADY IN DISTRESS.

TWO weeks from the day upon which he landed from New York, Old Bill Peepe stood in front of a drug store at the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street and puffed upon his last cigarette. He was no longer a resident of the Giltmore Hotel.

After returning from his breakfast this morning he had found his door locked and sealed, and his luggage impounded by the management. Although this was not as great a catastrophe as it might have been, since he had carried out piecemeal most of the contents of his trunk and grips, put them in a canvas bag and checked them at the railroad station, it was sufficiently serious because he had no place to lay his head that night and no money in his pocket.

Despite his vast experience, Mr. Peepe had found Hollywood a hard nut to crack. A man can't get a job unless he can lay his case before a prospective employer, and all the film producers were in buildings surrounded by high walls and guarded by insolent underlings who failed to respond to all known lines of approach.

The legitimate theater was flat on its back, as is usual in Los Angeles, and the newspapers had lists of applicants for employment yards long. Eel-like as was the character of Bill Peepe, he hadn't been able to wriggle under cover anywhere.

On Gotham's Broadway was a multitude who responded to quick touches. So far he hadn't encountered in Hollywood much of any one except fellow borrowers. The pesky place was full of down-and-out press-agents.

Bill smoked his last cigarette to the last quarter inch and, with a sigh, threw it in the gutter. As he did so a huge lavender touring car ran up to the curb and stopped directly in front of him.

"Mr. Peepe!" said a crisp, high-pitched voice.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Old Bill. In the front seat beside a stuffy-looking chauffeur sat the beautiful British blonde, Lura Leeds. And she was calling him imperiously.

While the crime of the Twentieth Century Limited did not weigh on his conscience, Bill had no desire to encounter the beautiful victim. Yet her manner was not outraged. He took heart.

"Well, well, well," he said blithely. "The most beautiful star on the screen in positively the most vociferous motor car in California. Lura, you're a smashing hit before your first picture is out."

"I wish to speak to you. Step in, please," she commanded.

William leaped into the tonneau, leaned back on the cushions and glared insolently at pedestrians upon the boulevard. With some satisfaction he saw Lew Gooltz, who, about a quarter an hour before, had refused to loan him a couple of dollars. Mr. Gooltz was standing on the curb staring with open mouth. Bill cut him dead.

The motor car turned west on the boulevard and presently stopped at the Roosevelt Hotel. Bill leaped out and beat the chauffeur in the rush to open the door for the blooming Lura Leeds.

He followed her across the lobby, which was disfigured by the faces of a score of song writers from Tin Pan Alley, and into an elevator. He smiled winningly at Lura as they rode upward, but she ignored his smile.

AT the fourth floor the elevator stopped and the girl led the way into an attractive little suite as full of flowers as a funeral parlor.

"Sit down, Mr. Peepe," said Lura. "I'll see you in a minute."

Bill waited nervously for four or five minutes, unable to figure out the purpose of his presence here, and then Lura returned. She had changed her dress and removed her hat.

"I never supposed," she began with a slight smile, "that Arthur would actually throw you off the train."

"That's all right," said Mr. Peepe generously. "I wasn't hurt much."

"You see, I knew Arthur was on the train and I expected to see him, and when he presented your forged letter . . . I presume I could have you jailed for that," she said sweetly. "I told him of your plot. You don't blame him, I hope, for feeling some slight—er—resentment?"

"Oh, no, not at all," replied Bill politely. Incredible as it seemed, this English girl had a sense of humor despite her nationality.

"And you'll agree with me that the article you wrote was vicious?"

"No," he retorted with spirit. "It was founded on fact."

"Vicious, due no doubt to pique at being unceremoniously tossed from the train," she continued. "It was calculated to do me serious injury. How could a man who looks as chivalrous as you wish to hurt a poor girl who was a stranger in a strange land?"

"I am being kidded," said Mr. Peepe

sadly. "I don't look chivalrous and you know it."

"Mr. Mandelbaum was perfectly furious and still is. He is even angry with me."

"And why not?" demanded Bill. "You're engaged to him and you smuggle a boy friend on the train. You and he deserved to be shown up. If you brought me up here to rub it in that I've lost my job, I'll be going now."

Lura approached him and looked down upon him with infinite appeal.

"Mr. Peepe, how would you like to be engaged to Mr. Mandelbaum?"

Bill grinned. "If Izzy ever tried to kiss me, I'd call a cop."

"Well, I don't like it either."

"Beats me how a blooming British rose like you ever stood for that caterpillar."

Lura sighed. "It's a very hard world for a girl, Mr. Peepe."

"Well, it isn't so soft for some members of the male sex, Miss Leeds. . . . Now, I know you don't like me. From your standpoint I did you dirt. You've got me up here for a purpose. I'm broke and I admit it. Tell me who you want murdered. Izzy?"

"I have a very high opinion of your ingenuity," she said gently, "and your —er—shall we say unscrupulousness?"

"Never mind, lady, my feelings have been assaulted by experts. Go on."

"You are responsible for the situation in which I am placed and you ought to feel it your duty to help me out of it."

Old Bill sat up and began to take interest. "I only do my duty when I get paid for it," he asserted.

"You will be paid."

A gleam came into his mad blue eyes. "I'm working for you, Miss Leeds," he declared.

SHE seated herself, crossed her legs and leaned forward confidentially.

"It's like this, Mr. Peepe. I was broke in London and I happened to meet Mr. Mandelbaum. He fell in love with me. I loved another."

"The guy who threw me off the train!" snorted Bill. "Well, there's no accounting for tastes. I prefer Izzy."

"Don't be humorous, please. Lord Arthur is a younger son and he is penniless."

"Him and me. Who paid his way across the ocean and on the Twentieth Century?"

"To be frank, I did. I love him, Mr. Peepe."

"You must."

"Mr. Mandelbaum promised me a contract at two hundred guineas a week with his picture company if I would become engaged to him. What could I do?"

"What you did," said Bill cynically. Long experience with beautiful actresses made him immune to melting eyes and quivering lips.

"I thought the matter over, and it seemed to me that while a business contract is legal and must be carried out, they can't do anything to a young woman who breaks an engagement because she finds that she doesn't love the man after all. So I accepted. I was in dire need."

"And so was Lord Arthur. I follow you, lady."

"I became engaged to Mr. Mandelbaum, but I kept him at arm's length, as it were, until we reached New York. I had to promise to marry him within a month after reaching Hollywood. My intention was to break the engagement

immediately after arriving here. Having signed my contract, they would have to employ and pay me just the same." She paused for breath.

"Did I hear you call me unscrupulous?" asked Mr. Peepe softly. "Lura, I'm just in the kindergarten. Now, now—don't tell me it's a hard world for a woman again. It's a cinch for them, if you ask me."

She shook her head dolefully. "Oh, but it isn't! He has taken shameful advantage of me."

"Izzy's smarter than I thought," Bill commented dryly.

"Last night I broke the engagement. I found I didn't love him as I had supposed—and what do you think he said? That I would marry him as per agreement or be dismissed from my position! I laughed in his face. 'I have a perfectly legal contract,' I declared."

"Sure you have," replied Old Bill. "Go home and read it."

"Oh, I've read it," shrugged Lura Leeds wearily. "In fine print there is a clause that if an actress becomes notorious in any way, and secures publicity which is injurious to her and the company, she may be summarily discharged and the contract is null and void. Isn't that outrageous?"

"The morality clause," exclaimed Peepe. "I've heard of it. And the company has the say regarding how much harm is done. So he got you on that."

"Because of the abominable article you put in the newspapers about Lord Arthur Cheltworth and me, Mr. Peepe!" she said angrily. "It's all your fault and you've got to fix it. It puts me at the mercy of Mr. Mandelbaum."

"And the dirty hound fired me by wire for placing you just where he wanted you," cried Peepe. "Why, he ought to have raised my salary!"

"But your story was nothing but lies!" cried the blonde hotly.

"Hah! I thought it was lies. I thought I was turning out first-class fiction—but it's the truth and how!" exclaimed the press agent.

"They were lies, lies, lies!" she shrilled dramatically.

"Yeah? You pay this lad's expenses across the ocean. You buy him a ticket on your train. You have him in your drawing-room and you plot to give poor Izzy the gate and marry the Earl of Who's-this, and you turn on me and tell me I'm a liar."

"Well, he isn't married with two children, anyway," she retorted.

"That was a minor inaccuracy. The fact is that this scandalous publicity has enough truth in it so you can't refute it. You'll marry Izzy. And if I'm not broke at the time I'll send you a pickle fork for a present."

MISS LEEDS began to sob, and her tears were real and from the heart. Bill could never resist tears.

"Aw, quit that," he muttered uneasily. "Izzy done me wrong, too. I'm for you, kid. You're too good for Izzy or for Lord Chumpley either. What do you want me to do?"

"Arrange it so that Mr. Mandelbaum will release me from my engagement and won't discharge me from the film company."

"Five hundred dollars—"

"Why, certainly!"

"In advance, and two thousand when I've got it fixed."

"I think I can manage that," she agreed, sniffling and drying her tears.

"And you got to do what I tell you, Lura."

"I shall."

"Then: first call up Izzy and say

that you'll be engaged to him again, but you positively won't marry him until you've been here at least two months."

"All right."

"Ship Lord Saphead somewhere east of Suez. Anyway, don't put in any time with him. This isn't New York; news gets around."

"That will be hard, but I'll make Arthur see it is necessary," sighed Lura. "And how will you manage for me to break with Izzy?"

"You leave that to me. Lura, you are probably the most beautiful woman that ever smashed into this sink of four-flushers and you don't need Izzy Mandelbaum for a husband. Don't worry at all, but slip Izzy a kiss once in a while to keep him from getting suspicious. Make your picture and watch my smoke. Er—the five hundred in my lily-white palm."

Lura ran into her room and returned with five one-hundred-dollar bills at which Peepe gazed with kindling eyes.

"If I wasn't flat, I'd do this for nothing," he declared earnestly. "I have it in for Izzy Mandelbaum. Buck up, kid. Ole Bill is on the job."

He retreated hastily lest she question him further regarding his non-existent plans.

The morality clause was placed in all motion picture stars' contracts some years ago when the mad mirth of Hollywood was in urgent need of being controlled, but it had become very useful since to the film corporations as a means of getting rid of players who were no longer profitable. All that was necessary was that a star who wasn't wanted should run afoul of the law in any way, or be named as a guest at a party whose wildness became a subject for newspaper comment.

Due to the quick thinking of Bill Peepe, Izzy held Lura Leeds in the hollow of his hand. Yet though the ethics of her conduct might be open to question, the poor girl had done nothing morally wrong. The way Bill looked at it, if a producer could use a film contract to force a girl to accept his heart and hand, she had just as much right to use a matrimonial engagement to secure a film contract.

The only trouble was to find a way to trim Mandelbaum. Izzy was firmly intrenched. Bill shrugged Lura's dilemma off his shoulders, snapped his fingers at a taxicab and ordered the chauffeur to take him to the Santa Fe station.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SENEGAMBIAN SERENADERS.

AS the distance from Hollywood to down town Los Angeles is seven miles and taxi fares are twice those of New York, Bill Peepe didn't save much on the trip. In about an hour and a half he returned with new luggage into which his belongings had been packed. It was characteristic of him that he never thought of paying his hotel bill down town and redeeming the old luggage.

After a bath, a shave, a haircut and a shine he made the acquaintance of the bootlegger at his hotel and ordered a supply of "the white stuff"—Hollywood gin—and then read the evening paper leisurely and comfortably.

In the film gossip column he learned that Mr. Isadore Mandelbaum was giving a dance at his home in the hills that evening in honor of Miss Lura Leeds, who, folks whispered, would soon wed the rising young producer. It carried a photograph of Miss Leeds,

which did not do her justice in Bill's opinion because it was unable to reproduce her coloring. Among the list of guests Lord Arthur Cheltworth was not included. He noticed that the "Senegambian Serenaders" had been engaged to furnish dance music.

There was no rancor in Bill's heart against Izzy Mandelbaum because his former pal had become a millionaire. Izzy belonged to a successful race, and though he had only half Mr. Peepe's ability, he was not a victim of rum, the curse of the show business. Bill's fury was entirely because Izzy had discharged him for a publicity stunt which was so profitable to the producer that he ought to have raised the press agent's salary, instead. Bill thought if he could talk to Izzy he could persuade him that great injustice had been done.

To think was to act with Bill Peepe, when he was sober, and he made up his mind that he would be in attendance at the party to-night.

MR. MANDELBAUM kept bachelor hall when he was in Hollywood, in a red-tiled mansion of the type referred to, dryly, as Hollywood-Spanish. It was large, luxurious, set in spacious grounds, possessed a swimming pool with colored lights under the water—oh, up-to-date in every respect and admirably suited for entertaining on a large scale.

Upon this occasion the film colony was out in force to get a close-up of the beautiful English girl who loomed as a dangerous rival of the female stars and as a charming novelty for the men. At nine o'clock the house was full, and it was at that hour that a tardy Senegambian violinist put in an appearance.

"You're late," accused the butler. "The boys are playing already."

"Ah done had a puncture, boss," explained the darky, whose black face contrasted comically with his starched shirt front. "Dat music certainly am ter'ble without me."

"You go to the end of the hall and you get to the ballroom by the rear," the butler instructed him. The Negro nodded, and followed instructions until he came to a bathroom door, which he entered and locked. Removing his coat, vest, collar and tie, he turned on the tap and scrubbed industriously.

Presently the long, saturnine countenance of William Peepe came out from under the burned cork and grinned at itself in the mirror. Having removed the last vestiges of charcoal, Mr. Peepe put on his high collar and black tie and white vest and satin-lined tuxedo. Opening a bathroom window he dumped out upon the grass below his empty violin case, and then opened the bathroom door and prepared to join the other guests. A waiter bearing a tray crossed his path and Bill helped himself to champagne with both hands.

It was pretty fair stuff and he gave Izzy Mandelbaum credit.

The big drawing-room was filled with undeniably beautiful women and more or less brave men. All were strangers to Mr. Peepe, but he gave each a nod and a cheerful smile, which was usually returned, and elbowed his way through the throng in search of the host.

As it happened the host saw him first, uttered an imprecation, came up behind him and laid a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Who invited you here?" he demanded rudely.

"Hello, Izzy," Bill replied airily. "I represent the press."

"I've got the society reporters here already," replied Mr. Mandelbaum. "You get out."

"Ah!" said Bill in a low tone. "I'm not a society reporter. This kind of thing gives me a pain, though the wine is good. Imagine you passing out champagne, or anything else! No, Izzy, I represent the city department of the *Examiner,* and you'll talk to me privately or things will bust wide open. There are rumors, Izzy, rumors."

"Well, come into my den here," growled the producer with some apprehension.

Izzy led him across the hall and opened a small room which was empty because he kept it locked.

"Now, you cheap faker, say your say and be on your way," growled Izzy truculently.

"YOU did me the dirtiest trick that ever happened in my long and distinguished career," began the press agent. "Here I put your star on the front page—"

"If you had the brains of a flea you'd know we don't want that kind of publicity!"

"—And make everything jake for you," Mr. Peepe continued evenly. "I tie that girl hand and foot and turn her over to you. She's got to marry you or get the gate. The morality clause, old top." He gave Izzy a playful dig in the ribs.

Mr. Mandelbaum scowled ferociously. He was a short, squat, flat-nosed, wide-mouthed and most unpleasant-looking person, and Bill could see why Lura didn't care for him as a husband.

"Who told you that? Damn you!"

"It was like this, Izzy," said Bill confidentially. "I had just got the job on the *Examiner* and I happened to be alone in the city room when in came Lord Cheltworth and spilled the works."

Izzy swore profusely.

"I heard him through," continued Bill. "Little did he know that he was talking to an old pal of yours, even though you had done me wrong. Anyway, I hated him worse than I did you, because he threw me off the train at Albany."

"You mean to say he didn't know you?"

"He supposed I was in Albany in a hospital. Besides, I had a haircut and a shave and I was cold sober."

"Well, it's a pack of damn' lies! Lura loves me and we're going to be married in a couple of months."

"Sure, he told me that, too. Lura put you off a month. It's part of the game."

"What game, you gonnif?" demanded Mr. Mandelbaum.

"The game to get you to break her contract. Don't you see?"

"You're coocoo," said Izzy scornfully. "The last thing she wants is to lose her contract. Why, she's even ready to...well, never mind that."

"To marry you, you were going to say. That's what you think."

Mr. Mandelbaum looked perplexed and his contemptuous manner vanished.

"Sit down, Bill," he said. "I didn't invite you here, but after all we're a couple of old pals and I'd like you to have a good time. To tell the truth I went off my head when I read those morning papers. Lura is my *fiancée,* the girl I'm going to marry, and the man I hire makes reflections on her character. You can't blame me for grabbing a telegraph blank, Bill, now can you?"

"Did I know she was your *fiancée?* I made her famous, didn't I?"

"Do I want the public to think I marry a woman that breaks up homes among the British nobility? And did

I know then that this bum, Lord Cheltworth, was alienating her affections?"

"Sure, you didn't," said Bill soothingly. "And it wasn't until at least five minutes after you fired me by wire that you realized that you had Lura where you wanted her because of my brilliant work—on the morality clause."

"Well, maybe. If you was to take the pledge, Bill, I might give you back your job, if you was to tell me what you mean by a game to make me break her contract."

"ON his way across the continent," said Mr. Peepe confidentially, "Cheltworth heard that his elder brother was killed in an airplane and his father had a stroke and probably won't live a month. That makes him the Earl of Glandmore and one of the richest men in England, and he wants to marry Lura right away and take her home to be presented to the king and queen as his new earl-ess. Now you got a clause in your contract saying that marriage of the star does not release her from the films and that clause was upheld under California women's rights laws only a few months ago. So whether she married this guy or not, she's stuck in the talkies for three years if you want to take up your option."

"I suppose this Cheltworth told you that, too."

"Sure. The first move is to make you mad, and that's why she postponed the wedding a month. She thought you would fire her right away and her disappointment is terrible. You can't blame the girl if she prefers an English earl who is half owner of the Bank of England to a funny-looking film producer who, maybe, will go broke in a year."

Izzy scratched his head. "You're such a liar, Bill," he said sadly, "it's hard to believe you at all. She told me the other night that she wanted to break our engagement, but she looked scared to death when I told her I could bust her contract, too, on account of the scandal she got herself into on the Twentieth Century Limited. It don't look to me like she wants to get out of that contract."

"You thought," snorted Bill Peepe, "she'd *tell* you she wanted it broken?"

Izzy grinned. "Not if she was wise, she wouldn't."

"The richest lord in England and Izzy Mandelbaum, rivals for the hand of Britain's fairest daughter! That's not a bad story."

"You publish that and I'll break your neck!" shouted the film producer. Then he grew reflective, and a grin spread over his homely face.

"If she run out on me and married him, I'd have the only genuine British earl-ess in the picture business."

"Come to think of it, the wife of an earl is a marchioness," said Bill Peepe.

"Why?"

"You expect me to explain the vagaries of the British nation? She will be the Marchioness of Glandmore."

Izzy shook his head. "That's a tough name for electric lights. Earl-ess is better. Duchess would be swell."

"Marchioness is what you get."

"Mrs. Mandelbaum is best," Izzy decided. "I'm crazy about Lura, Bill. Now the thing to do is to sic some old vamp on this Lord Cheltworth and have him wake up married to her in Agua Caliente. Missoula May could do it."

"Cheltworth is practically under my management," Bill informed him. "He's put his affairs in my hands. But after all, he did throw me off the train."

"Frame him. Make Lura realize he's no good. You're back on the pay roll, Bill."

"At three hundred a week, eh?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

"And I get two weeks advance right now?"

"You don't suppose I carry that much—"

"You always have a big roll in your pocket. Peel, Izzy, peel."

Most reluctantly the producer drew from his pocket a roll of thousand-dollar bills.

"Smallest I've got," he declared.

Mr. Peepe with much pride produced a roll of hundreds, tore off four and snatched a thousand before Mandelbaum could recover from his astonishment.

"Leave everything to me," he advised. "I'll see that Lura marries you and spurns the British aristocracy... Now I need a little drink and the society of beautiful and rather careless film actresses."

Rather dubiously, Mandelbaum led him back to the party.

CHAPTER V.

FLYING FISTS.

AN exalted mood bore Old Bill Peepe on wings. This morning he had been down and out; now he had a thousand dollars in his pocket and was on two pay rolls. He was a man of infinite resource.

To be sure, he was on thin ice. Lura had hired him to force Mandelbaum to release her from her distasteful engagement, but to keep her profitable film contract. Izzy, on the other hand, had hired Bill to make Lura marry him, and to get rid of Lord Cheltworth by keeping her in Hollywood. If Izzy and Lura ever had a confidential moment things would be unpleasant for poor Old Bill. But, anyhow, he had a thousand dollars.

Mandelbaum, of course, would institute inquiries and learn that the elder brother of Lord Cheltworth was still alive and healthy, and that the old Earl of Glandmore was taking his brandies and soda regularly, and that Lord Arthur had no money and no prospects. After that he would either have Bill arrested or charge off the six hundred dollars to profit and loss. However, Mr. Peepe had up his sleeve a card unknown either to Izzy or Lura Leeds.

Whether it was a good card, time would tell. In the meantime Mr. Mandelbaum's waiters were still serving good champagne. Old Bill was refreshing himself with his third glass and eying the houris of Hollywood with more and more approval, when there came a tug at his elbow and he looked down into the suspicious eyes of Lura Leeds.

"What are you doing here?" she asked in a low angry tone.

"I'm working in your—hic—interests, Rose of Alandale."

"You were closeted with Izzy Mandelbaum for half an hour. I saw you both go into that room."

"What sharp eyes you have! Fact is, Lura, Izzy and me, we're like that—" He placed two fingers together. "I'm now his confidential adviser. He won't take any step without consulting me."

"So you've gone over to the other side," she complained.

Bill bestowed on her a knowing look. "That's what he thinks, darling. He's sorry he fired me and I'm back on the pay roll working in your interests."

"And what are my interests?"

"Come here," he whispered. "Through this door. Out on the balcony."

She followed him reluctantly.

"Did you know that you've been jobbed; that Mandelbaum took unfair advantage of you? That the representatives of Mammoth Films were just going to offer you two thousand dollars a week when you signed up with Mandelbaum for a beggarly thousand?"

"Why, no," replied Lura, pitifully. "I was only making twenty guineas a week when I signed with Mr. Mandelbaum. I thought that he was very generous."

"Delectable one, you certainly did need a manager! Just after I left you I met Otto Flack, president of Mammoth, and he told me that he'd grab you at two thousand just as soon as you were at liberty. Watching over your interests all the time, that's me."

"Then I'd better let him break my contract, hadn't I?"

"Sure. You go right in there and tell him that you want to marry Lord Cheltworth and go back to London because you don't like motion pictures."

Miss Leeds studied him covertly.

"After all, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," she said sagely. "And I'm afraid I don't trust you, Mr. Peepe."

"Don't trust me?" he asked in pained surprise.

"How do I know that Mr. Mandelbaum didn't put you up to this?"

"You'll find out when you tell him what I said," he replied with a grin.

"SO!" interrupted a thick voice. "With the house full of swell people, Lura, you have time to waste on a gate-crasher, a bum. Peepe, you ain't wanted here. Get out. Lura, go back and make good with the invited guests . . . And we get married in a month like we arranged it first."

Lura reared her queenly head, opened her beautiful mouth to say something scathing, changed her mind and swept past her *fiancé* with indescribable hauteur, and left the two men alone on the balcony.

"Now," demanded Izzy menacingly. "What were you saying to Lura?"

Bill laid a finger on his chest.

"I was just telling her that I saw Lord Cheltworth having dinner at the Montmartre with a beautiful Mexican brunette, you sap. Sowing the seeds of distrust. And they're working, Izzy. Did she say anything when you told her the wedding would not be postponed? In a month, she'll be tickled to death to marry you."

Mr. Mandelbaum looked dubious. "Just the same, you wasn't invited here and you better get out," he said finally.

"I was going anyway. One more drink, maybe two, and I'll leave your party flat."

"I'll see that you go," said the host grimly. He conducted Bill across the drawing-room and into the hall where, Bill's luck holding, they encountered a waiter with a tray of brimming glasses. Bill took one in each hand and drained them before Mr. Mandelbaum could prevent such a waste of good liquor, and then the butler took him in charge and pushed him into outer darkness.

IN a very contented mood, Bill Peepe walked down the path to the front gate, but his progress was suddenly impeded. A man darted out from behind a palm tree and confronted him. He was no taller than Bill and no broader, but Mr. Peepe knew from experience that he was stronger.

"Now, you scoundrel!" muttered Lord Cheltworth. "I've something to say to you."

"Eh?" gulped the astonished press agent. "What—why—well, if it ain't his lordship and none other! Things have come to a pretty pass in America when a lot of low motion picture people get invited to a party and a British aristocrat has to lurk in the shrubbery. Eh, what?"

"I wouldn't darken the door of a filthy bounder like Mandelbaum," retorted Lord Cheltworth. "And I want the truth out of you, you reptile, or I'll give you what-for!"

"Well," said Bill Peepe. "I'll overlook your insults. I understand your state of mind. You're in love. Filled with jealousy and wrath, you prowl about the grounds of your successful rival ready to save her from his repulsive embraces—only why be nasty to me? I'm your friend."

"I saw you standing on that balcony with Miss Leeds. You're not fit to touch the hem of her garment, you hound."

"I never tried to touch the hem of her garment. I don't go in for that kind of stuff," protested Bill. "Let's you and I go somewhere and have a whisky and soda and talk things over. Hey, what?"

"You give me back the five hundred dollars you swindled out of that poor child this afternoon. That's my first business with you."

"I suppose you could use five hundred very nicely," reflected Bill. "I never carry money on my person. Miss Leeds engaged me to perform for her a very difficult task. Well, it's performed. Nothing would induce Izzy Mandelbaum now to break her film contract. On the other hand he has just informed her, at my request, that he releases her from his engagement to marry him. I tell you this to show you how you have wronged a good man, meaning Old Bill Peepe."

"I say!" exclaimed the Englishman. "Is that really so?"

"You are the first person who ever expressed a doubt of a statement by William Peepe, Esquire," replied Bill.

"Then take that for being damned officious!" cried the lordling. His hard, bony right fist came up and struck William Peepe on the point of his lantern jaw with such force that birdies sang and fireworks displayed themselves, and then everything was dark and silent.

CHAPTER VI.

MORNING AFTER.

MR. PEEPE had bounced off the path and landed in soft grass under the shadow of a bush. Presently he recovered a certain amount of consciousness, but he was very comfortable where he lay and ten or twelve drinks of champagne made him exceedingly drowsy. He decided to wait a minute before rising, and the next thing he knew the beautiful California sun was shining upon his eyelids and a small dog had hold of his right ankle and was nipping it playfully.

With a groan he sat up and rubbed his eyes. Morning had come in all its Los Angeles glory. He appeared to have put in six or seven hours of peaceful slumber upon the estate of Izzy Mandelbaum, and all the party guests must have passed homeward within a few feet of him without interrupting his slumbers by their shrill chatter.

Furthermore he had to go home in broad daylight in evening clothes. And, horror of horrors, he had amnesia. He

had told a lot of people a lot of different things last night and he didn't remember what he had said nor to whom.

He rose and walked unhappily out into the road, and then he realized that it was two or three miles to his hotel and he had no means of transport. To be sure a Ford car stood at the roadside, but it was locked and the careful owner had carried off the key. Bill felt very old and was sure he couldn't walk three miles.

He climbed into the Ford, released the emergency, and the locked car began to roll down the hill. While Mr. Peepe had little experience as a chauffeur, he managed to steer fairly well, and by braking at the curves, he saved himself from disaster. Believe it or not, that locked car transported Mr. Peepe all the way down to Hollywood Boulevard before it lost its momentum, and he left it at the curb only three blocks from his hotel.

It was only 6 A. M. and there were very few persons abroad, so he attracted little attention with his evening clothes which, after all, are not an unfamiliar morning sight in Hollywood.

A bath, a change of clothing, and then down to the dining room for breakfast where a waiter thrust into his hands a morning newspaper to occupy his time till the pancakes were done.

Bill remembered now that he had fixed things with Lura Leeds, and made some sort of arrangements with Izzy Mandelbaum, and appeared to have squared everything with Lord Cheltworth when that bounder unaccountably knocked him into dreamland. But exactly what he had said and to which of the three he had said it were still very vague. He was sure he had elaborated, too; he had been in superb form, and his imagination had never been more brilliant. And the thousand dollar bill reminded him that he had profited hugely by the events of yesterday.

Ah, well, he would remember details by and by.

For a change there was news on the front page. According to the Los Angeles paper, New York was in the grip of a blizzard which had killed scores, and fully an inch and a half of snow had fallen, while the temperature had descended to the dreadful depth of eighteen above zero. He grinned at that California propaganda. Poor newspaper work; it would have been just as easy to say eighteen inches of snow and fifty degrees below zero. New York wouldn't have cared.

THERE was an aviation disaster in Europe, too. A Paris-London plane had crashed, killing twelve, among whom was Lord Cheltworth, his wife and two children and his father, the Earl of Glandmore.

Bill stared at the article and everything he had said last night came back to him. It was psychic, that's what it was . . . But did that explain why Lord Cheltworth had hit him?

Bill went up to his room and sat down at his desk. As well as he could remember them, he wrote out the several explanations he had made last night. Conversation between himself and Izzy: He had said that Lura wanted to break her film contract in order to marry Cheltworth, return to England and be presented at court.

Between himself and Lura on the balcony: He had told her that Mammoth Films would pay her two thousand a week if her contract was broken.

Second conversation with Mandelbaum: He had said that he had just told Lura a wild story that Cheltworth was untrue to her, which should result

in her marrying Izzy and fulfilling her film contract, after all.

Conversation with Lord Cheltworth: He had told the lord that Izzy had released Lura from her matrimonial engagement, but would not break her film contract.

The statements to Lura and Izzy had placated them, but Cheltworth had accused him of being officious and knocked him for a goal. Now why was that?

Obviously because Cheltworth no longer wished Lura to work in films. It meant that the Englishman had heard last night of the death of his father and brother and baby nephew, knew that he was the Earl of Glandmore, and being madly in love with Lura, wished to marry her and take her home to shake hands with King George and Queen Mary.

Now that was an absolute verification of the first statement made to Izzy Mandelbaum. Izzy must regard Bill's remarks from now on as beautiful pearls of truth.

It also explained why Cheltworth wanted him to give back the five hundred dollars paid by Lura to save her film contract. As Cheltworth wished the contract broken and believed that Lura would now agree to leave the films, he thought the payment was unnecessary.

No matter how rich an English nobleman may be he is always thrifty. Fortunately the principles absorbed at Oxford and Cambridge had prevented the noble earl from going through the pockets of unconscious Old Bill Peepe.

BILL smiled contentedly. He had been on the level with Lura. He had agreed to save her movie contract, and received a down payment. Bill stood ready to go ahead and save it, but she had changed her mind. Surely that didn't entitle her to any money back. Legally he could collect the unpaid balance. Cross off Lura.

Lura, of course, would definitely refuse to marry Izzy Mandelbaum. But Izzy, forewarned by faithful old Bill whom he had wronged, would not invoke the morality clause; he would hold Lura to the contract out of jealousy and spite. And if she married the Earl of Glandmore, Izzy would profit by having a marchioness on his pay roll. Lura with a title would be five times as valuable to him. She might not want to stay in Hollywood; but she certainly couldn't blame Bill for doing what he was paid to do.

It was a good old world after all, Bill sighed contentedly. Let's see, there was some other trick which had occurred to him last night, some brilliant idea which would turn the tables upon either Izzy or Lura at need. But he couldn't remember it. Was it a real idea, or one of those nebulous notions produced by second-rate champagne? Anyway, he wouldn't need it now. He had a job with Mandelbaum Productions, and he was all squared with Lura Leeds and her noble but pugnacious lover. And he had a thousand dollars.

The Earl of Glandmore. Twice that cocky Englishman had laid hands upon the sacred person of Old Bill Peepe. Going to marry the prettiest girl in the world, and suddenly entered upon an earldom, and yet he was cheap enough to try to get back Mr. Peepe's hard-earned five hundred dollars. Bill didn't think he liked the Earl of Glandmore. He owed him one. No, he owed him two.

An idea pecked on Mr. Peepe's dome. A money idea. In his hands were all the details of a romance that made the affairs of Dante and Beatrice,

Petrarch and Laura, Abélard and Héloïse, Leander and Hero, Romeo and Juliet, and Anthony and Cleopatra look insignificant. Had any of these lovers chased the object of his affections seven thousand miles? Were there in existence any good photographs of the historical heroines? Had their romances culminated that very morning in Los Angeles? Did any of them have a motion picture contract? And had any of them been presented at a swell party last night as the *fiancée* of Izzy Mandelbaum?

If this had happened in New York, Bill could have sold the story to a newspaper for two or three thousand dollars. Out here he might not get more than a couple of hundred.

The thing was hot news. Right on the heels of the denied story about Cheltworth crossing the continent with Lura, the lucky stiff had come into an earldom through the death of two presumptive heirs in a plane crash. The papers loved plane crashes. This story had every element to make even a Los Angeles editor come through with cash.

Singing a merry little song, Mr. Peepe made his preparations for the journey down to the newspaper district. He summoned a taxi. He put on a new suit purchased in New York out of Izzy's advance expense money. He leaped into the taxi, waved his hand to the chauffeur and said, "Los Angeles *Examiner*, first."

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISED EARL.

A COUPLE of hours after the unprincipled Mr. Peepe had set forth anew to exploit the romance of the battling Britisher, his lordship the Earl of Glandmore was being ushered into the apartment of Miss Lura Leeds. Lura sat at breakfast with the morning paper spread before her. In her eyes was an expression of profound satisfaction.

"Darling!" she exclaimed as Arthur entered. "Isn't it wonderful! We can be married, and then—I shall be a marchioness!"

"It's all so unexpected," said the earl as he wriggled out of her embrace. She had tipped over the table to leap into his arms.

"Eh? What's that?" she exclaimed. "You mean you don't want to marry me?"

Glandmore seated himself, drew out a handkerchief and touched his eyes.

"The poor old pater!" he sighed. "And my brother Ernest, and poor little Harold. Snuffed out. *Puff!* Just like that. Airplanes are treacherous things, Lura."

"Yes," said Lura dryly. "Wipe away those crocodile tears. It makes you the Earl of Glandmore, doesn't it?"

"Quite so. It's a tremendous responsibility, Lura."

Her eyes flashed dangerously. "Meaning what?"

"Well, I was stony before. Now I am saddled with a million pounds of indebtedness. Everything is mortgaged to the hilt, you know. The castle in Yorkshire will go under the hammer and the shooting box in Scotland and the villa at Antibes—"

"Arthur Cheltworth, you are engaged to marry me!" said Lura Leeds sharply.

"Well—er—hardly, you know, since you are engaged to this motion picture creature."

"Arthur!" she gasped. "How can you say that?"

He grinned feebly. "You can't be

engaged to two men at once, can you now?"

"So that's your attitude!" she said angrily. "I was good enough for you when you were a younger son with no hope of the title, but now that you are the Earl of Glandmore I'm not good enough for you. You cad, you rotter!"

"Oh, I say—"

"I'll sue you for breach of promise," she threatened.

"With Mandelbaum's engagement ring on your finger? I'm afraid you couldn't put it over, Lura. That's a little too much to expect."

"I b r o k e the engagement with Mandelbaum last night," lied Lura Leeds.

"But you still have the ring he gave you."

"I never return rings. No intelligent girl does."

"Be reasonable, darling. I've got to marry some deuced heiress over here to pay off the family debts. Sacrifice myself, that's what I must do. *Noblesse oblige*, eh, what? N o b i l i t y compels one . . ."

"You rodent!" cried the outraged young woman. "To think I ever permitted you to kiss me!"

The earl rose. "Fact is, Lura, I love you madly, but I haven't a penny, and if you break your engagement with Mandelbaum they'll chuck you out in the cold. No sense in our starving, what?"

"Mr. Peepe will fix all that," she said confidently. "He is most ingenious."

"Oh, that scoundrel! Take no stock in him. I tried to force him to return your five hundred dollars last night, but he didn't have it on him. Anyway, while we might have lived on your earnings before the catastrophe, they won't support the earldom, you know. I need a woman with millions."

THE telephone rang.

"Mr. Peepe calling," the operator announced.

"Send him up," commanded Lura. "You stay right where you are, you wretch."

"I suppose I'll have to knock the rascal down again," sighed the Earl of Glandmore.

Mr. Peepe looked a trifle startled when he entered, but he met the glare of the Englishman brazenly.

"Twice you've taken an unfair advantage of me, me lud," he said, smiling. "However, I bear no malice. Glad to see you love birds together. Lura, I've come for my two thousand dollars."

"What do you mean?" she demanded, startled.

"I've put it over for you. Your contract will not be broken by invoking the morality clause. You go right on drawing a thousand a week for three months, and if your first picture goes over they'll have to keep you on. Leave it to Old Bill Peepe."

"Well," said Lura sagely, "you'll receive the balance when what you predict comes to pass."

"Oh, it will come to pass, all right. Your marriage to the Earl of Glandmore clinches things. The Marchioness of Glandmore will be a great box office attraction, and Izzy is too good a business man to chuck you just because you married an earl instead of a buttonhole maker."

"I told you last night you were too damned officious," said Glandmore furiously.

"It doesn't look as though I were going to marry the gentleman," said Lura bitterly.

"Don't be silly," replied Bill cheerfully. "The announcement is in the afternoon papers."

"What's that?" shouted Glandmore.

"Gave them the whole yarn as soon as I read the news of your accession to the earldom," said Bill airily. "You get quick action from Old Bill Peepe. It made a marvelous romance. Good follow-up of the Twentieth Century Limited story. Young love—Beautiful English chorus girl wins a coronet—British aristocracy gets a good-looking marchioness for a change—King George gets a break at last—Film colony loses most promising young star—Izzy Mandelbaum is out one blushing bride. Lura, the afternoon papers will give you eight columns on the front page."

"You scoundrel! You blackmailer!" shouted the earl.

His face was contorted with rage. His fingers were curled like claws. He bore down on the press agent.

"WHAT'S the matter with you?" asked Bill blankly. "Don't you like publicity?"

The knobby fist of the Earl of Glandmore whizzed through the air, but for once Bill Peepe was not upon the receiving end. He side-stepped neatly, and as his lordship drove past the Peepe right paw came up in an uppercut learned in many barroom fights, encountered the bony jaw of the British champion and sent him down for the long count.

"Good!" exclaimed Lura Leeds. "Good work, Mr. Peepe!"

"Say," stammered Bill, "I thought you loved the guy."

"I've found him out," declared the girl. "I was O. K. when he was nobody, but he wants an heiress now."

"Well, anyway," said Bill, "you'll get a lot of publicity."

"And a lot of good it will do me," sighed Lura. "Of course it ends my engagement with Mr. Mandelbaum, and he will be spiteful enough to break my film contract. That cad on the floor there will deny our engagement. And I can't sue him for breach of promise, because he can prove that I'm engaged to Izzy."

Bill scratched his head. "Imagine running out on a girl like you. I'll hit him again when he comes to."

"No, no. I forbid you."

"I'll fix things," said Bill, with gleaming eyes. "This guy crossed a lot of State lines with you. That's a crime in the United States. You can give him the choice of marrying you or going to jail on the Mann Act. And when you've married him, Izzy Mandelbaum can't break your contract on the morality clause, because you've made him your lawful wedded husband. And as the Marchioness of Glandmore you'll be a great bet for any film company."

"Wha'—wha'—happened?" stammered the Earl of Glandmore as he sat up and blinked.

"You were kicked by a mule, Ronald," Bill informed him. "Now you marry this poor girl or you go to jail for twenty years for violating the white slave act. You never heard of it, but it's the worst crime possible in the United States of America."

"White slave? White slave?"

"Sure. You crossed a few State lines in her company, your lordship. We may fail to convict a few million gunmen, but we put 'em away fast on the charge of kidnaping young ladies."

"Are you in this dastardly plot, Lura?" asked Glandmore.

He was very white, and he tottered as he stood upon his feet.

"I am not!" she said contemptuously. "I wouldn't marry you if you were the last man in the world. I can't understand what I ever saw in you."

"My duty to my family name," he muttered. "I love you just as much as ever, Lura."

"SUE him for breach of promise, anyway," urged Bill Peepe. "Don't let him get away scot-free. I understand now, me lud, why you walloped me last night. You were sore because Izzy freed her of her engagement to him."

"Oh, did he?" exclaimed Lura joyfully.

"Well, not exactly. I just told this guy that, so as to make him feel good."

"I'm not going to stay here to bandy words with you, my man," said Glandmore furiously.

"You're stronger than I am, but I've got more science," replied Bill. "You stand there one second longer and I'll demonstrate."

"You had better go, Arthur," said Lura sadly.

The Earl of Glandmore departed. Lura fell into a chair and wept copiously. Bill eyed her sympathetically for a moment and then thrust his hand into his pocket. He drew forth eleven one hundred dollar bills and a few twenties, counted off five hundreds and thrust them into her hand.

"I hooked Izzy for six hundred smackers and I got a hundred and fifty for the engagement story," he explained. "I don't need your money, kid. I'll manage you for nothing."

"You seem to have mismanaged me," she said reproachfully, "but I forgive you, for knocking down that—that snake."

"Well, now, let's take 'count of stock," he proposed as he seated himself and lighted a cigarette. "Things are a little complicated. When Izzy sees the afternoon papers he'll hit the roof, but he'll calm down. And you can tell him that you have found out that you love him and not the Earl of Cheeseham, see. That will tickle Izzy to death, because he will have won the girl away from the crowned earl by his lovely personality. You will marry him, get a divorce at the first possible moment, and have a great career in pictures."

Lura stopped weeping and thrust out her firm little chin.

"No!" she declared. "I'm through with lying and I don't care what becomes of me. I won't marry that Mandelbaum person. It was Arthur who persuaded me to pretend I was engaged to him, to get the film contract."

"If there are any more like him in the House of Lords you'll be able to smell the place a mile," commented Bill.

"I thought he was handsome," Lura mourned. "Bill, if you could have seen how mean he looked when he told me that his earldom made it impossible for him to marry me . . ."

"He didn't look bad lying on the floor," reflected Peepe.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUSINESS À LA HOLLYWOOD.

LURA picked up the telephone, which had started to ring.

"Mr. Mandelbaum calling; please hold the line," said a secretary's voice.

"Let me talk to him," suggested

Peepe, and snatched the instrument from her hands.

"Hello, Izzy," he said brightly. "No, you can't talk to Lura. I've just been appointed her business manager. Talk to me."

"All right, low-life, I'll talk to you," said Izzy savagely. "I got a tip from down town that she's run out on me and give me the mitten because this gonnif is an earl—just like you said."

"They are in here now, fixing up the wedding arrangements," asserted Peepe.

"They are, are they? Well, I looked this Glandmore up, see? He's a bum. His father was a bum. They live on the interest of what they owe. A busted earl, that's what he is. He thinks he's going to park here and live on the money I pay her. She thinks she can string me along . . . You let me talk to her."

"Give me the telephone," commanded Lura, who had heard the shouts of her enraged *fiancé*, as must have all the persons in the Mandelbaum Administration Building. "Talking is unnecessary, Mr. Mandelbaum," she said crisply. "Break my contract if you like. I'm not going to marry you, nor am I—"

Bill rescued the telephone by a quick swoop.

"Maybe things can be fixed up, Izzy," he suggested.

"You give me back my six hundred dollars, thief!" shrieked the producer. "Lies you told to me last night. And you tell that blond swindler that a messenger is on his way down with official notification that her contract is cancelled."

"I don't care," said Lura. "I don't care! I've got money enough to get back to England, nearly."

"If you haven't, I'll lend it to you."

Her eyes filled with tears, and she extended a small soft hand.

"You are a good sort," she declared. "The only generous man I've met in years, I do believe. But why did you tell Izzy I was going to marry Glandmore?"

"Well, I thought he might make a better offer. I forgot he had facilities for looking your ex-boy friend up. If he offered to raise your salary and gave you a new contract, they could not pull the morality clause on you. In that case you would have consented not to marry Glandmore, wouldn't you?"

Lura met his eyes and she laughed merrily.

"You are sublime, Bill," she declared . . . "Do you suppose that's Mandelbaum again?"

Bill reached for the telephone.

"HOLD the line. Mr. Spelvin of Colossal Films wishes to speak to Miss Leeds."

Bill lifted his eyebrows. "Spelvin—that's the big cheese over there."

"Shall I speak to him?"

"I'm doing this, baby."

"Hello; Miss Leeds?" rumbled a heavy bass voice.

"This is Mr. Peepe, her manager," said Bill. "Suppose you tell me what you want?"

"I've got it straight from down town that she is to marry the Earl of Glandmore," said the president of the Colossal.

"The newspapers are never wrong," Bill assured him.

Spelvin chuckled. "And I have it straight from Mandelbaum Productions that Izzy threw a fit and cancelled her contract on the morality clause."

"Right," said Peepe.

"He can't get away with that. Her marriage with Glandmore makes everything right," Spelvin assured him.

"Oh, sure, we know that, but we are accepting the cancellation. We've already got another offer."

Lura was regarding Bill with eyes big as saucers.

"Look here—don't sign anything until you hear from us!" ordered Spelvin.

"You've got a nerve. We're accepting the first satisfactory contract that comes into this apartment."

"What do you call satisfactory?"

"Twenty-five hundred dollars a week and no strings on it. No personal appearance with the earl—get that. No exploitation of his title."

"Well, a contract to Miss Leeds with the specification that if she marries she will use her married name—surely she will be willing to do that."

"I'll tell you what we'll do. If you have a contract signed by you up here in an hour, made out to Lura Leeds, she will sign it. The earl wants her to go back to England, but his income is small, and she's a smart little girl. But she won't stand for getting a contract on his title. If that isn't satisfactory to you, ring off. We've got lots of offers."

"It will be there in an hour," promised the president of Colossal Films.

"What was that all about?" demanded Lura eagerly. "I heard you say twenty-five hundred dollars and something about exploiting Glandmore. I won't have it."

"Keep your teddies on, baby," soothed the press agent. "These birds have spies in newspaper offices and in other film companies. They have heard about the great romance which will appear in the afternoon editions, and they know that Izzy has cancelled your contract. They put that down to bad judgment caused by wounded affections. Because of the yarn I pulled at Albany they haven't a doubt that the wedding stuff is straight. Glandmore will get down town to deny it about the time all the evening papers are on the street.

"Spelvin is aiming to pull a fast one by signing up the future Marchioness of Glandmore. He knows that half a dozen studios will be after you as soon as they hear that Mandelbaum has let you go. I demanded that the contract be made out to Lura Leeds. Get me?"

"But that is obtaining it under a misapprehension. It's unethical."

"Who ever heard of ethics in the film business? What any one thinks is of no consequence, if he keeps his thoughts out of the contract. You get twenty-five hundred dollars a week for three months, anyway, thanks to the genius of Old Bill Peepe."

"YOU are a genius," she said earnestly. "But I don't think I should sign."

"If you don't, I'll forge your name," he declared. "We are just outsmarting the craftiest and most unprincipled people in the business. This Spelvin is notorious for taking advantage of actors."

"Well," sighed Lura, "I do need the money."

A messenger boy knocked, and delivered a document from Mandelbaum—the official cancellation of her contract.

"Great!" cried Bill. "Now we're all set."

"I don't understand," remarked Lura, "how a man as clever as you could be in financial difficulties. You

were stony yesterday. You admitted it."

"Drink was my downfall," he said solemnly.

"Why do you drink?"

"Well, I'm a bachelor and alone, and I've always been on the road ahead of shows. Believe me, you have to drink to stand the towns you visit."

"But if you were married you wouldn't drink so much, would you?"

He grinned. "I don't suppose my wife would let me. Anyhow, who would have me?"

"You are a very likable person and you have a remarkable mind," she assured him . . . "I'm nervous, aren't you?"

"A couple of hours delay," conceded Bill, "would be fatal. That jackass you were in love with might be standing on the corner of Hollywood Boulevard, for instance, broadcasting that he isn't going to marry you."

"I was never so excited in my life. I'll earn over six thousand pounds in three months."

"You'll make good in films. You have everything. By the end of three months, if you turn out a good picture, they'll forget that you trimmed them. They are like that."

Tap, tap on the door. Bill almost fell out of his chair, and Lura grabbed a table. She thought she was going to faint. Peepe opened the door.

A dapper young man stood there.

"I AM Mr. Spelvin's secretary," he said. "I have contracts to be signed by Miss Leeds."

"Come in," invited Old Bill. "I'm Mr. Peepe, her manager. Lura, let this gentleman sit here while we go into your bedroom to discuss the contract." He walked into the bedroom and Lura tottered after him. Bill closed the door and tore open the contract. He ran his eye rapidly over it.

"Seems all right," he muttered. "Made out to Lura Leeds, salary twenty-five hundred dollars per week. That's fine . . . Oh, my stars!"

"What—oh, what?"

"The dirty hound double-crossed me. Listen to this clause!" And he read:

> This contract is issued with the mutual understanding that Miss Leeds is about to be married and will permit the use of her legal married name instead of her maiden name if the company so desires.

"Torpedoed!" groaned Bill.

"But suppose I don't get married. I could be engaged to Arthur and still not marry him."

"The contract is issued with the understanding that you marry. It's no good if you don't. All they are after is the title."

"But it doesn't mention the title."

"That's because I told them nothing doing. They figure they've got you just the same because they think your legal married name will be Marchioness of Glandmore. I told you they were smart."

"Then, what shall I do?"

"Throw up the sponge, kid," he groaned. "It will do you no good to sign this."

"Twenty-five hundred dollars a week," she sighed. "Let me see the contract."

Her brow wrinkled as she read it.

"Bill Peepe!" she said suddenly. "You need a wife."

"Eh?"

"And I certainly need a manager, and he might as well be my husband. Don't you see that they haven't specified whom I marry?"

"Tha's right, tha's right," Bill murmured. "Oh, the saps! You could marry anybody and collect. But gee, Lura, you don't want to marry me! I'm a bum."

"You are not! You are very much of a man. You've got brains and courage, and I like you."

"We'd never get married if it was not for this," he protested.

"You like me, don't you?"

"I tried to kiss you that day in the train, didn't I? I never pulled one like that before."

"Then let's," said the girl laughing. "If I sign this, I need somebody to protect me from their wrath. We'll sign and go right out and get married."

"There's a three day clause in this State. We'll have to go to Nevada."

"Well," said Lura, "let's go to Nevada."

"Married!" gasped Peepe. "Old Bill Peepe married!"

"You've got to stop calling yourself old," she declared. "I won't have it."

"The ball-and-chain already," he sighed. "Soft pedal on the licker, I suppose."

"You suppose correctly."

"Oh, well," he groaned, "come out and sign the contract."

"Just wait a minute," said Lura, smiling broadly. "Don't you want to kiss your *fiancée?*"

Fifteen minutes later they went out and signed the contract.

THE END.

Packing Case Homes

TERRIFIC destruction and loss of life were caused by the recent Santo Domingo hurricane; and the reason lies in the type of houses built there. Although the Dominican Republic is possessed of mighty forests, logging is difficult by reason of the lack of transportation. Practically all building material in the southern portion of the country is imported from the United States, and lumber is expensive.

For this reason many of the poorer homes of Santo Domingo City have been composed of the packing cases in which foreign goods were shipped. A glimpse at some of these unpainted shacks is sometimes mirth provoking. Scattered among the ruins of stone buildings erected in the days of Columbus and his successors one may read legends such as "Boy Beer the Best in Bremen," "Steinberg's Silkoline Step-ins," or "White Horse Whisky."

One such shack is particularly ornate, its outer surface being covered with stenciled bulldogs' heads, advertising a well known English ale. American shoe firms are prominent, and the shack dweller will, if his visitor can speak Spanish, inquire about the location of such cities as Lynn, Brockton, and Boston.

Much of Santo Domingo's cheap furniture is also manufactured from packing cases, but this is painted before being offered for sale. Not so with the cheapest grade of coffins, however, such as are furnished by the government for pauper funerals. The tops and sides of these are covered with flimsy black cloth, but the bottoms show traces of "Johnny Walker" or "Best Alaskan Salmon."

C. A. Freeman.

The dacoit chief held out the "magic" uncertainly

The Elephant Sahib

The power that American-born Ben Quorn had over Asoka, five tons of elephant, was mysterious and uncertain; almost as uncertain as anything else in life, in that mountain State of India

By TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "Asoka's Alibi," "The Affair at Kaligaon," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

"I AM afraid you must die, Mr. Quorn," was the greeting of the young Ranee of Narada, an independent State on India's mountain border, to her one completely faithful officer, the Philadelphia-born keeper of her elephants.

For Quorn, ex-taxi driver, had such a mysterious power over the otherwise untamable Asoka, the five-ton giant elephant, that the superstitious natives believed him a reincarnation of the legendary Gunga *sahib,* a half-god of the old days; just as they believed Asoka was the Gunga *sahib's* elephant come to life again, and the Ranee a princess of that bygone time. And the Brahmin priests, jealous of the Ranee's power and furious at her progressive plans for cleaning up Narada's worst indecencies, had played on the belief, saying that all three of them would die and then come to life again to save Narada. All that interested the Brahmins was making sure they died, and quickly.

And things were complicated by the desire of three neighboring rajahs to

This story began in the Argosy for December 6.

annex the beautiful Ranee and her kingdom—in spite of her known fondness for the penniless but daring Prince Rana Raj Singh. These rajahs have driven the dacoits—organized bands of robbers—from their States into Narada, where they have just about conquered the region about the ruined palace of Panch Mahal.

So the Ranee sent Quorn, at the head of thirty-four elephants, to protect her workmen rebuilding that palace. But he found the workmen treacherous, and was himself threatened with torture if he would not betray the Ranee to the Rajah of Dumdumpore. And a woman was in command of his captors.

CHAPTER V.

"WHO SHALL DARE TO DEFY THEM?"

FAMILIARITY with gods begets a sort of democratic insolence. Because of his agate eyes and his resemblance to the Gunga *sahib* pictured on the stone wall in Narada, not less than a million men and women regarded Quorn as some sort of minor deity. But that did not prevent their arguing with him or trying to play tricks on him, even though they made a mess outside his tent with offerings of flowers, and stuck sticky paint on his tent pole.

Even though they sometimes prayed to him—to his huge annoyance—they never hesitated to try to cheat him, so that in self-defense he had been forced to become observant, alert and drastic in his dealings with them.

As a special means of coaxing him to bless their scandalous intrigues with other people's wives or husbands, they sometimes even threatened to believe the scandal of the priests, who whispered calumnies about Quorn being no sort of god but a very mean human obsessed by a devil.

"Believe anything you like, you suckers, only don't blame me if I act up to your crazy beliefs," was his usual answer.

He had a theory that to carry weapons, as a rule, is a mistake. He kept the automatic in his overcoat chiefly to prevent ignorant villagers from praying to him outside his tent, the sides of which had many bullet holes. He had never yet hit any worshipers, but there had been some close squeaks.

That morning he almost hit the foreman. He had gone into the tent to shave himself before daybreak by lantern light, unaware that his shadow on the tent cloth took strange shapes as he scraped at his chin. The quarry laborers were hardly to be blamed for thinking he was making magic. They began to sing a sort of dirge to him, on their knees, outside the tent, and he fired a piratical shotted salute by way of acknowledgment.

"You heathen!"

He seized the heavy iron *ankus* and rushed out to break up the meeting.

"I'll change your religion for you damn quick! I'll use a Stillson on your consciences!"

But they were gone, because an angry god is nobody to trifle with. Only the foreman stood there, looking ruefully at a necklace made of beads on copper wire that he wore as a protection against unfaithfulness, his three wives being nearly a hundred miles away, in a tenement room in Narada City. A bullet had neatly cut the copper wire and there was one bead missing.

"Which wife is it?" the foreman asked, holding out the necklace for Quorn's inspection. Quorn snatched it

and threw it away. However, good foremen are hard to get, and reasonably bad ones better than none at all, so Quorn did not brain him with the *ankus*. He grew suddenly calm.

"It's all three of 'em," he answered. "Get yourself another batch. There'll be a stack of 'em to choose among, soon as them dacoits is settled with."

"Who shall dare to defy them, *sahib?*"

"You sucker, that's what I'm here for."

INSTANTLY he wondered why he had said that and wished he had not said it. However, it was too late now to take it back; he tried to drive it out of the foreman's head by giving him something else to think about, bullying him to make him set the men to work in the quarry and then, the minute the chipping and hammering began, demanding an inspection of stores in the hope of finding shortages, for which he could worry the man out of his wits.

But everything was there except the food that the dacoits had taken; and at that, they had left about a week's supply for the hundreds of quarrymen. There was evidently some one in command of the dacoits who understood the art of living off a country, leaving enough to encourage production of more, in the same way that one leaves an egg in the nest of a laying hen. They had left the tools undisturbed, too, so it was plain that they wished to encourage the quarrying.

"Why in heck didn't they take that dynamite?" Quorn demanded of the foreman.

"They did not know what it is, *sahib*. I told them it is sausages made from the blood of pigs in the United States. So they left that for us to eat, saying it is unclean and forbidden to such honorable people as themselves."

"What about them coils of fuse? What did they think they are?"

"I told them that it is rotten cord supplied by a cheating contractor. I explained we must send it back to be exchanged for stout, new cord. So they left that also, saying they will take the good cord when it comes."

Quorn returned to his tent to write a report of the situation for the Ranee and to ask her to send additional supplies of food. Writing was not his forte; it took him a long time, tearing up sheet after sheet of paper, inking his fingers and staining his turban when he stuck the pen behind his ear.

He was like a man making out an income tax report; it made him frantic; he found it next thing to impossible to condense his thoughts into any reasonable space or to arrange them in proper order. Several times he almost decided to tear up the report and to return on Asoka to say it all as a sensible man should, by word of mouth.

"But she'd think I was running away," he grumbled and resumed his writing.

It was afternoon, and the report not finished but beginning to resemble a coherent statement of the facts, when a party of dacoits came. Quorn, at his folding table inside the tent, observed their interest in the elephants. He smiled to himself as they gathered in front of Asoka.

"Maybe the suckers'll try to steal him," he muttered. "Let's hope. They'd find a red hot locomotive a heap easier."

They were all mounted on lean, tough-looking country ponies. Fifty of them, armed with assorted weapons, kept in something vaguely like a cav-

alry formation. Three had baskets filled with human heads, from which the blood was still oozing and forming a filthy plaster.

On foot in the midst of the party was a group of newly captured women, some with babies at the breast. They had finished their wailing; they were dumb with dread and nearly dropping with weariness; some were tied together by the wrists, but nearly all of them were too woebegone and spiritless to need more than a whip to keep them moving.

THE leader of the party was a handsome ruffian armed with a naked sword, with a four-foot blade that he wore tucked into the cummerbund about his waist, which also held two daggers. His long black hair was coiled in a knot under a bright red turban. He rode without stirrups and had big spurs strapped to his bare heels.

His clothes looked as if they had been stolen from a wedding party—assorted sizes and colors, but every item new and hardly soiled, except where he had sweated through the striped silk shirt and where one sleeve was dyed dark crimson by the blood of some unfortunate.

In his own good time he rode to Quorn's tent, smiling, and dismounted by bringing up his right leg over the pony's neck.

"*Salaam*," he said genially, hitting the pony on the rump to make it move away. He came and leaned against the tent pole, peering in, appraising Quorn's belongings.

"What do you know about peace?" Quorn asked him. "*Salaam* ain't any word for a guy like you to use."

The dacoit did not understand. He signed to one of his followers, who rode forward to interpret. The leader tipped him off his horse and drove the horse away. They pranced for a minute or two, making mock lunges at each other with naked weapons, so that it appeared to Quorn their savagery was of the genial type—murder for mere amusement, without any special malice or hope of gain.

"You guys want to earn a dollar?" he asked, showing the one that he carried for luck. "Fight it out, then. I'll give this to the one that kills the other."

The leader snatched the coin, then asked what the talk was all about. The other told him. Quorn, grimly regretting his silver dollar, suddenly gave birth to an idea.

"Tell him," he said, "that's magic. Tell him, spit on it."

The outlaw spat voluminously, holding the coin in the palm of his hand, as far away as possible, and squirting an accurate stream between widely spaced teeth. Quorn made mysterious movements with his hands, closed his eyes and gabbled off two whole verses of the "Wreck of the Hesperus," the only poem he had ever learned by heart. He spoke too rapidly to be understood.

He paused, then turned to the interpreter. "Tell him he's all right now if he acts friendly and as long as he don't lose that piece o' silver. But if he loses it, swaps it, or throws it away—or if he does me any dirt—there'll come a devil in the night and gnaw his entrails. 'Twouldn't ha' worked if he hadn't took it from me. But he took it, so now he has to take the consequences. If I die afore he does, now, he'll be plumb up against it. Torture ain't nothing to what'll happen to him. But he's all right if he acts right by me."

The outlaw chief looked worried—naïvely credulous but resentful of being

caught in such an unexpected trap. He grinned and scowled alternately, tossing the coin in the palm of his hand. At last he wrapped it in a corner of his loin cloth, along with all the earrings of the women he had captured, and walked away, taking the interpreter with him.

He went and stared again at Asoka, presently making his men round up several mahouts, whom he questioned arrogantly at first, then, little by little, with something almost suggesting courtesy. Quorn could not hear, but it was clear enough that the mahouts were trying to play safe by describing their chief as a master magician whom even gods obeyed.

THE outlaw returned to Quorn's tent. For a minute or two he stood irresolute, as if he hated to feel beholden and yet did not dare to pass up opportunity. At last he touched the fold of his loin cloth in which the coin was tucked away and began shooting quick questions at the interpreter, visibly impatient with him when the man hesitated for the right word in English.

"This things is—how you say—good magic?"

"You bet."

"It—ah—it—protec' him?"

"Same as I told you already—perfect—one hundred per cent—unless he forgets hisself and loses it or takes a dirty dig at me."

"Good against any one?"

"Any one—anything—anywhere—rain or shine—day or night. There ain't no kind o' predicament what that piece o' silver ain't minted to meet. Why, wi' ten o' those I've come free out of a judge's court, I have. With five of 'em I've stood off such hunger an' thirst as you've never imagined, let alone felt. With one like that—the very living spit o' that one—I've transported myself best part o' thirty miles without once setting feet on the ground. Magic? That's the marvelousest piece o' magic ever you seed."

"He is captain—yes—you understand me? He like be big man—how you say it? Sultan—yes?"

"I get you, su-u-ure." Quorn almost grinned. He only saved himself by looking at the basketful of human heads and at the group of abject women. "Wants to be boss, does he?"

"Ah, yes—that him—that word—how you say it?—boss, yes? Very big boss dacoit have not treat him much nice—understand me?"

"I get you. Say! You tell him a handsome guy like him ain't doing right if he goes taking orders from some one else. Tell him to look straight into my eyes." The bandit leader obeyed and flinched. Quorn's eyes were like a goat's, agate-yellow and mysterious.

"He's a born leader o' men," Quorn said. "He ain't doing his duty by hisself if he don't make hisself the boss dacoit over all of ye. That magic what he took from me 'd make a rajah of him if he'd act right. But he's got to have faith—use his wits and act crafty. And when the right time comes he'll have to hit hard wi' that snickersnee o' his."

"How soon he do it?"

"That depends," Quorn answered. "Let me look at the palms of his hands."

Knowing not even the vaguest rudiments of palmistry, Quorn was in no way hampered by tradition or that little knowledge that so handicaps the licensed wise men of the world. He scowled over the hands, followed the lines of the palms with the point of his

pen, nodded, muttered to himself and at last pronounced his verdict.

"Keerful—keerful! He mus' first make sure he has a sizable good share o' men to back him up. Then smite sudden and without no warning. See? See here—ye see that split in the line o' life—ye see that? Any sucker knows what that means. That's where he splits the gang in halves. He does it surreptitious—see that curlicue? Then see here—see that new line coming in? That's where he cops the leadership. And soon, too. It won't be long now."

"THIS magic — this good only against mans?" asked the interpreter.

Again Quorn's wits saw daylight. "I should say not! Look here—look at this guy's lump o' Venus! Holy mackerel! Why, there ain't a woman living as can resist him—not with that there magic in his jeans. It's jes' the sort o' magic as the women fall for readiest. And there's no woman—"

He paused. A fortune teller is entitled to be told a thing or two.

"What if she has bigger magic?" the interpreter asked.

"There ain't none stronger. There's some that maybe *looks* bigger. But what he has there is one hundred cents to the dollar—you get my meaning? There ain't nothing in the world to equal it, exceptin' more o' the same kind. Howsomiver, there is several sorts o' women."

There was a whispered conference between the leader and the interpreter. Then:

"What if her name was Usha? Would that make any difference?"

Nothing made any difference to Quorn in that mood, but he suspected that this might be the name of the woman who had trapped him in his own tent. He proposed to find out.

"It might make a heap o' difference," he answered. "Let me see your hand again—the right one. Now—if she had dealings with a rajah, I should say," and he looked into the outlaw's eyes, "you'd better watch your step and come to me for good advice afore you act too definite. But if she'd had no truck with any rajah, then—"

"She is a rajah's spy," said the interpreter. "She is a rajah's dancing woman—"

"Yes," said Quorn, "I see she's that. You see this mark here on his lump o' Venus—all higgledy-piggledy? That's what that means."

"She is treacherous, and very clever, and most desirable. Her eyes are as a heifer's and her breasts are as ivory aged in oil of sandalwood. Her thighs are—"

"I should say he'd have to watch his step," Quorn interrupted. "My advice is, let him come to me and talk things over 'fore he takes a long chance. Maybe I might think up some more magic. What's this guy's name?"

"Narak."

"I'll remember it. I'll study out the proper sort o' magic for a name o' that exac' length. And you say the woman's name is Usha? I'll consider that, too. Run the two together and we get Narakusha, don't we? Well, that looks simple enough, but I'll have to study it. You see, that magic what he took from me works two ways. It obliges me to do him favors. I'd have bad luck if I didn't. Tell him he should come and see me rather frequent. And he'd better come by night, so's nobody won't know.

"And one more point—them women. No, I don't care for one jes' now. I don't want no women, they're a nui-

sance. But if this guy wants a lot o' good luck, seeing he has that magic on him, he must treat those women special extry gentle. You see, he had the women with him when he met me. Otherwise, I'd say treat 'em anyhow, and I don't doubt he'd do it. As it is, he'll play safe if he treats 'em kind. So long, then. Tell him to come soon, by night, and talk things over."

CHAPTER VI.

"SO YOU, TOO, HAVE BEEN PAID TO TALK ABOUT DACOITS?"

BLOOD had dripped on the ground from the baskets of heads; Quorn ordered it cleaned up. Then he wondered again what made the quarrymen, and even his own mahouts, so fearless in the neighborhood of a camp of dacoits who did not hesitate to murder for mere amusement.

Quorn had plenty of time for meditation; there would be no work for the elephants until a lot more stone was quarried; it was evident enough that the Ranee had sent him there to cope with something very different from hauling stone.

"But I do wish she'd explain more to a feller," he regretted. He had a habit of soliloquizing with his head between his hands and elbows resting on his knees. "She believes in these here gods, but I don't. Die an' come to life again, eh? Dying is easy hereabouts. But the nearest I ever came to a resurrection was after I got drunk that las' time and Asoka pulled me out o' the river. Well, I'll say this: she's a good sport. Me and her has played many a game. I never knowed her not to rig the deck against a crooked dealer. She's the smartest, four-flushingest, squarest-acting bluffer I ever see. And she don't neglect her friends. Here's hoping."

So he helped himself to rye whisky and gave Asoka some, pretending to himself that the chill mountain air might otherwise give his favorite pneumonia. But the truth was, no man ever loved a dog more thoroughly than Quorn did that enormous beast, and he liked to share good liquor with him. He was even slightly jealous of the other elephants because most of them were better behaved than Asoka and received more gifts of sugar and sticky sweetmeats from people who came to look at them on fête days and holidays. He took another drink. Between them he and Asoka finished a quart of the stuff, and hope's barometer rose several degrees.

And then came the *babu* Bamjee, wonderful to see in European riding breeches and a big sun helmet that made him look like a trained monkey on horseback. The Ranee's guileful purchasing agent was riding a big gray mule that happened to be Asoka's special stable crony. The mule pitched Bamjee over his head and, after trying to kick the saddle off, strolled away to help himself to supper from Asoka's pile of hay—the only creature in the world that would have dared to do it. Quorn helped the plump *babu* to his feet and straightened out the helmet with his knee.

"Serves you right, you sucker," he remarked. "You ought to buy your own mule 'stead o' grafting off the Ranee's stables. A guy who grafts all the money you do ain't acting honest trying to save horse-hire. What's up?"

"She is. Up on a camel. Mrs. Galway."

"Who the deuce—"

"The literary lady in the green-rimmed spectacles, whose dog Asoka

slew—whom the Ranee refused to receive at the palace—whom the gods have made mad enough to write books—whom I personally guide at cut rates—cut rates, Mr. Quorn, believe me—to see India as is. Am sadly disillusioned babu; very. She is adamantine. Cash is the blood of her veins and it flows not forth. She knows price of everything, including the fact that the camel is out of the Ranee's stable; therefore she will not pay for same.

"First I tried to put her in a bullock-cart, believing she would not see quite so much, because a bullock-cart has canvas cover. But at the last minute she demanded a camel, from whose cursed hump she watches me like a vulture, overhearing too much.

"Fortunately she is camel-sick. She has spilled scent over the animal to make him smell less awful. And she is so stiff that she shrieks when she tries to gesticulate. She has to stop for rest at frequent intervals, so she may not be here for two hours."

QUORN grunted. "After dark, eh? Well, what of it?"

"Nothing—nothing of it. I am disillusioned, that is all. I had a dream of a great tourist enterprise that should grow from this small beginning. But when I spoke of it to her, she exclaimed she will write in her forthcoming book that tourists should stay away from India."

"Suits me," said Quorn. "I've druv too many o' them suckers in my taxi back home. Ought to be a law ag'in' 'em. Come to think of it, there is a law ag'in' 'em in Narada. She's out o' bounds, that's what she is."

"She says India is full of liars and unclean people, Mr. Quorn. She says that the natives who ride on elephants habitually butcher small dogs, presumably because the dogs are cleaner than themselves. She says there are no dacoits, but that we pretend there are because we hope by that expedient to cover up misgovernment of native States."

"And what was it she called the Ranee?"

"An anachronism, Mr. Quorn."

"She's a bad fare, that's what she is," Quorn said grimly. "What's the other news?"

"There is plenty. The Ranee has said to the priests that you undoubtedly will die and come to life again. So the priests are telling all the people you are already dead—or if not dead, as good as that—because you are a fraud and an impostor whom the gods will no longer permit to frolic on your vicious elephant at the risk of honest people's lives.

"There is a rumor, circulated also by the priests, that the Ranee is to lose her throne because Narada is to be divided into two, and one part added to the Rajah of Dumdumpore's dominions, one part to the dominions of the Rajah of Hathiabad, who, however, is a very decrepit person and does not wish it, so that the Rajah of Dumdumpore may perhaps get all of Narada.

"People are very excited. They are saying that the dacoits are a menace. There is talk of a petition to the British government. It is said that the dacoits have destroyed six villages and have slain upward of a thousand men. It is being said that the Ranee intends to build a palace here, most sacrilegiously upon the ruins of a building that the gods once cursed, because she intends to make use of the dacoits to enforce her power in defiance of higher authority."

"And you bring that there Mrs. Galway into such a mess as this, to

write her book about it?" Quorn asked. "Ain't you sort o' nervy, for once?"

"*Sahib*, I would not have dared to do it, only we have an escort. No, not of police—not of the Ranee's soldiers."

"Good job. Them guys 'ud get strung up by the dacoits quicker than butchers wring chickens' necks. Who is the escort then?"

"Prince Rana Raj Singh follows us, at a discreet distance, with four-and-twenty of his Rajput relatives, all mounted, and a train of mules with all their camp equipment. He appears to have come ready for a long stay. So, although there is a gap of at least a quarter of a mile between our parties, it may appear to the dacoits that we are a rather large armed column and I think they will let us alone."

"DOES Mrs. Galway know who it is who is following her?" Quorn asked.

"No, *sahib*."

"Didn't she ask?"

"She has asked everything. If all the questions she has asked were printed they would fill a hundred books. So, since she proposes to write a book, I told her the prince and his party are bachelors riding in quest of virgins less than ten years old, whom they will seize and marry, such being our quaint custom."

"Why did you tell her that?"

"Because she likes to learn that sort of lie, *sahib*. And if she writes that in her book it may be people will understand she is a venomous liar. Then, perhaps, they will also disbelieve such few truths as she tells by accident. There are some truths, even about you and me, that we would not wish to be believed about us."

"Uh-huh. When's the Ranee coming?"

"I don't know, *sahib*. This *babu* has not her confidence."

"You won't have mine, you sucker, unless you come clean. You've had a talk with her. You've had a talk with Rana Raj Singh. And you'd never have dared to come here if they hadn't told you something special. Tell me—or I'll put the lid on this here one-hen tourist agency so quick you'll never guess what happened!"

"Mr. Quorn, be reasonable!"

"I'm the reasonablest guy that ever acted crazy for the sake of a sweet woman. Now—you tell me, or I'll put you on that there mule and send you to the dacoits along with my orders in writing that they must get off the lot. What they'll do to you won't bear thinking of."

"You know as well as I do, Mr. Quorn, that such personages as our Ranee and Prince Rana Raj Singh talk in subtleties. They say nothing that might be turned and used against them."

"Should I whack you with an *ankus?* Is that subtle?" Quorn asked. "What did they say to you?"

"Nothing—except that, unless I take great care, the dacoits may believe that Mrs. Galway is the Ranee. *She* said: 'Does she wear a veil against mosquitoes, Bamjee?' So I have told Mrs. Galway that our mosquitoes are very venomous, and I provided her with a long green veil. And *he* said: 'If it were thought she is the Ranee, rumor might travel ahead of her; do you know any way of stopping such a rumor, Bamjee?' So I think there have been rumors."

"Mebbe. Does Mrs. Golliwog look like any one on camel-back?"

"Most imperious, *sahib*. And she wields a silk umbrella against the sun. Too tall by many inches to deceive any

one, even at a distance, who really knows the Ranee. Nevertheless, to an ignorant stranger possibly convincing. Yellow dress and green umbrella—long green veil—she might indeed be any one.

"Her manner, when she is not being camel-sick, is arrogant, as if she despises all and sundry—as indeed she does. Furthermore, the ox carts follow, containing many tents and what not else, since she demands her privacy, being fearful lest prying eyes should behold her nakedness—which may mean she is chaste, although I doubt it. I believe that to her a woman is a secret sin in petticoats at war with all mankind."

"I've met 'em—lots of 'em," said Quorn. "They generally cuss you for driving too fast. Then they cuss you for missing the train. If they tip you, it's a nickel. After that they report you to the cops because the cab ain't clean. And if they lose anything, which they almost always does, they swear they left it in the cab and they have you pinched for not reporting it. When they find the thing afterward somewheres else, they don't apologize. I know 'em."

"SHE is looking for a husband, I believe," said Bamjee.

"What makes you suppose that?"

"She looks furtively, with the corner of her eye, at every handsome man of whatever race. But if he looks straight at her she is offended."

"Are them the symptoms?"

"Yes, *sahib*, because if a man looks not at all she is offended also."

"Ain't she ever pleased — not nohow?"

"Only when a man looks at her sideways. Then she is either pleased or else she thinks he means to steal her purse."

"Steady," said Quorn. "I see her coming."

Her arrival was even more immodest than Bamjee had suggested that it might be. She was camel-sick and tired, so she had fussed until a mattress was spread in a cart to her liking and on that she lay, as assertive as a toothache.

Nothing escaped her acrid comments. If a driver hit his bullock, or if a bullock moved too slowly, she remarked on it in a voice that was penetrating and exasperating without rising more than half a note, but the half note was flat and numbing to the finer instincts of its audience. It irritated, wearied and left nothing pleasant to consider in the moments between one sarcastic comment and the next.

She greeted Bamjee with a curt laugh as he stood with his back to the setting sun and bowed to her through the canvas curtains at the rear of the cart.

"My good man, if you expect to conduct a tourist agency you will have to learn manners, at least. The idea of your running off and leaving me! I have ceased to expect ordinary honesty; the mere fact that you are being paid to look out for my comfort means nothing, of course. But don't gentlemen wait on ladies in this country? Are women mere beasts of burden? I assure you I am not of that kind."

Bamjee almost physically ducked to let his shoulders shed the flow of words. He was beginning to learn to endure without retort. She sat up and rolled one curtain back.

"Dark already—and no lanterns? Trying to save kerosene? Where do you propose to set my tent? Why aren't the coolies pitching it? How is the cook to prepare my supper?"

Bamjee indicated where her camp should be pitched. She differed. When the coolies at last had pitched the tent on the spot she chose she demanded to be told which way the night wind would blow. Bamjee told her. Promptly she ordered the tent taken down and repitched with its back to the wind. Then questions:

"Whose are those elephants? Who are those men in the sheds over there? Are you sure they haven't plague? Is it safe to camp so close to them? Where will you draw the water? Has it not been fouled by all those men with their unsanitary habits? The idea of building a palace in a place like this —and with so much that really cried out loud to be done with all that money! Who was that man I saw you talking to?"

"Mr. Quorn," said Bamjee.

"That's a strange name for a native."

"He is an American, *memsahib.*"

"An American! Nonsense. Then why does he wear a turban?"

Bamjee almost lost his self-control. He dropped the title of respect but managed to keep his voice in hand: "He believes it comfortable."

"Likes to see himself dressed up, I suppose you mean. Ask him to come and speak to me."

QUORN strolled over. "Hey, you—light that lantern for the lady." He handed the lighted lantern through the curtains. "Like to be a cool night. Better wrap up," he said politely.

"I am told your name is Quorn. Who are you?"

"Superintendent of elephants."

"Oh! Are you not the man who rode that monster that destroyed my dog?"

"I am, miss. Thet there dog come mighty near to killing me, a barking at my elephant and making him act crazy. There ain't no four wheel brakes on an elephant and that one's hard to manage at the best o' times."

"Then he ought not to be allowed in the streets. You say he is your elephant? Then I shall sue you for the value of my dog."

"No, miss, he's the Ranee's elephant. He come near busting up her palace after he was through with your dog."

"Then I will sue the Ranee," she said implacably. "I suppose there are law courts in India?"

"All kinds, miss. Have you any kind o' permit from a court or a commissioner, or from the Ranee, giving you leave to visit these parts?"

"I don't need anything of the kind. I have a passport."

"That don't cut no ice. You're out o' bounds."

"My dear man, I have as much right to be here as you have. More, I dare say, if the truth were known. You look like a dissolute person to me. Are you a drunkard? What right have you to question me?"

"I ain't interested to know nothing about you, miss," said Quorn. "But I'm in charge o' this camp. I'm responsible. There's dacoits not many miles away."

Her laugh was flat and nasty—superior, incredulous and rude.

"Oh! So you, too, have been paid to talk about dacoits? I suppose in order to prevent timid people from coming to see for themselves what misgovernment means? Or is it one of the horrors that strong drink makes you imagine? Well, I am not timid.

"Let me tell you this: I wrote to your Ranee, from that despicable *dak-*

bungalow that is all the accommodation this uncivilized State provides for strangers. I suggested, very politely, I would like to call on her. As a matter of fact, I was intending to ask for her formal permission to travel all over the State. She did not have the courtesy to answer. She sent some flowers and a basket of fruit by the hand of a person who knew no English. And when I walked to the palace gate I was not admitted. So much for your Ranee! I intend to sue her for the value of my dog—even if I have to write to Washington about it."

"Would you care to see some dacoits?" Quorn suggested slyly.

"Certainly, if they were real."

"You shall," he promised.

CONTENTED, he turned on his heel and went to put his elephants to bed, sitting smoking his pipe beside Asoka for a long time, watching him flick little finicky wisps of hay into his mouth; and Quorn talked to him, as he sometimes did when a turn of events seemed satisfying.

"'Tain't often, buddy, that a fare like that one ups and asks for just what's coming to her. Mebbe our little Ranee ain't a wise one—mebbe! But what her game is this time, durned if I see! Wished you could talk, you fathead. Hello—here comes the Rana Raj Singh."

The Rajput prince had pitched his camp a mile away and came now riding a spare pony with an overcoat collar turned up to his ears. Quorn was always careful not to seem obsequious, but his manners toward a gentleman of courage and royal birth were a part of his own inherent dignity, so he got to his feet and took a stride or two toward his visitor, who drew rein. They shook hands in silence.

"Any news?" the Rajput asked when he had lighted a cigarette. The glow of the match betrayed his steady brown eyes and the aristocratic, rather stern face framed by a black beard.

Quorn told him all that had happened. "And now that female, she's here."

Quorn lit his pipe. By the match for a moment each could see the other's eyes.

"She is taking chances," Rana Raj Singh remarked. Quorn nodded.

"She don't believe in dacoits, sir. She allows 'at I'm a liar. Says she'd like to see 'em."

The prince drew at his cigarette until it almost blazed; then he suddenly threw it away. "Do you think that Dumdumpore might marry her, if he should catch her instead of—?"

"'Twould serve him good and right," said Quorn, "though yellow dogs like him ain't so easy to do justice to. Holy mackerel!"

"You understand me?"

"I get you, sir! When?"

"When occasion serves," said Rana Raj Singh. "But remember." He lighted a fresh cigarette and held the lighted match between his hands so long that he almost burned his fingers. He was one of those men who prefer to be seen distinctly when they speak of grave import. "Dumdumpore is the enemy. He has all to gain and we have all to lose. Therefore it behooves us to accept the long odds and take desperate chances. Take this."

He handed Quorn a folded document.

"That is your authority to arrest and detain Mrs. Galway if, as or when you think that necessary, either for her own protection or because she has no permit to wander at large in Narada.

"Bamjee is guilty of conspiring to

break the law, by guiding her, well knowing that she has no permit. You may arrest him if you find that necessary in order to compel him to obey you. Bamjee is a useful little person, but he now and then needs reminding to whom he owes allegiance. Don't lose that document. Don't show it unless you must. Rather than let it fall into the hands of, say, the British authorities, destroy it."

"You bet."

"Because the Ranee might be criticized for having signed it."

"Right." Quorn nodded.

"WE understand each other," said the Rajput prince. "If by any chance this Mrs. Galway, through her own misuse of stolen privilege, should be mistaken for the Ranee and should fall into the dacoits' hands, it would be well not to let her true identity become too soon known—to Dumdumpore, for instance. You will find that I have dropped a package in the shadow near your tent. Make use of the contents."

"Yes, sir."

"I approve your strategy of dividing the dacoits by encouraging this man Narak to conspire against his chief. Continue that by all means."

"Means look sort o' skeerce."

"I had thought of that. So had the Ranee. Your reputation as a maker of miracles needs suitable building up, of course. I brought a box with me that I will send to your tent. Its contents are not profoundly magical, but they may serve your purposes; you will find a pamphlet of directions. And remember: these dacoits are very simple."

"Yes, sir."

"That woman Usha is not simple minded. She has been in the United States and England, touring with a one-act play. She has posed as a gypsy, among other things, and as a teacher of occult arts, and she understands a lot about deceiving idiots.

"She is the brains of the Rajah of Dumdumpore, who is obsessed by a belief that she can make him very rich and famous. He does what she tells him to do. It was she who put him up to bribing all these dacoits to invade our territory. The fool has followed her because he can't endure to be far away from her and he is somewhere in the neighborhood.

"The rajah's plan, of course, is to capture the Ranee and force her to agree to marry him, afterward absorbing all her territory with the consent of the Indian government, which he expects to be granted on the ground that there is no other way of ridding the country of these dacoits, whom he bribed to come here. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know that, including my twenty-four Rajputs, we have only seventy-five men, of whom thirty or forty are needed as palace guards?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then use your luck and every faculty you have. You may depend on me to keep in touch with you and to do my part. But remember: I have no legal authority. I am merely a prince without a kingdom. I have less authority than you have. Good night."

CHAPTER VII.

"I'M ACTING ON A BRIGHT IDEE."

THE package left near Quorn's tent contained clothing from the Ranee's wardrobe. It was faintly scented with the subtle perfume that she always used. Quorn examined it

thoughtfully, smoked a pipe or two and sent at last for Bamjee.

"You're in bad," Quorn remarked by way of suspicious beginning.

"*Sahib,* I am always in bad. This *babu* is wealthy in Hope that springs eternal only to be bitten by the frost of bad luck. Am reduced to acting manager for this she-devil Mrs. Galway, who is seeing to it that my profit shall be in red ink, on the wrong side of the ledger. Ah me!"

"Care to see the inside o' the hoosegow?" Quorn asked.

"I would like to see the inside of almost anything. Am outside looker-on at profitable matters. What is a hoosegow?"

"Clink — chokee — coop — calaboose — jail — lock-up — dungeon— Royal Hotel Sheriff *à la* Ball and Chain. I have a paper here that bids me send you back in irons to Narada."

"What for?"

"Felony. High treason. Aiding and abetting an alien spy. Traipsing about the country with a female known by you to be in quest of official secret information. Defense o' the Realm Act. Minimum sentence ten years, and a fine o' twenty thousand rupees. Want it?"

"*Sahib!* Are you joking? No? This is calamity! I have a wife and children. Besides, I am innocent. I never knew she—"

"Good job me and you is friends."

"Ah!" Bamjee sighed deeply. "*Sahib,* I have ever been true to your heart's friendship. Not once have I ever neglected one opportunity to do you a favor."

"No? Sa-a-ay, if I weren't a tolerant guy with understanding o' your weaknesses you'd ha' cheated me out o' my eye-teeth long ago. And you'd ha' cheated the Ranee out o' more money than 'u'd run the State, plus interest. So can that line o' hooey."

"*Sahib,* I am struck dumb."

"Suits me. Dumb guys ain't obliged to be deaf—so you listen. That there Mrs. Galway now—where does she keep her wardrobe?"

"In her tent, *sahib.* Nightly she makes her servant unpack two trunks and hang everything to take out creases."

"Good. Is she in bed now? What sort o' kit does she sleep in?"

"God knows. Not even her servant has seen her asleep. She keeps a screen beside the bed."

"You get a good blanket and keep it handy. Then you go an' tell your camp crew that they know a dacoit when they see one. Get me? No mistakes now—nobody goes and recognizes my mahouts and gives the game away. Where does she keep her money?"

"I believe beneath the pillow, *sahib.*"

"Well, you'd better grab that, so's to hand it back to her and get some sort o' credit for yourself. You'll need credit—bad. There ain't a moon yet. 'Fore it rises there's going to be a rush o' howling dacoits—and a elephant—which nobody don't recognize that elephant or your name won't be Bamjee, it 'll be convict number umpty-um."

"*SAHIB,* would a smaller elephant not do? Asoka is so difficult not to recognize."

"You manage your end and leave me to manage mine," Quorn answered. "Get this: she'll run. She'll run promiscuous, and you after her wi' that there blanket. She'll pro'bly fancy you're another dacoit, so she'll run like the devil. Don't catch her too soon. Give us time to get away with all her clothes and hide 'em. Then you cover up her shame and let her be a modest

female—get me? Nex' you bring her back to where the tent was, though there likely won't be much tent, time Asoka's through with it. You help her hunt for her belongings, and you give her the money. Mind you now, you give her that money—all of it."

"Do you suggest I am a thief?" asked Bamjee, groping for shreds of dignity.

"I ain't suggesting nothing, excep' this: if she counts her money and some's missing, you make good. You get that? Time she's finished tossing off a few hysterics she'll begin to wonder how she'll look by daylight in a blanket and a flannel shift or whatever she sleeps in. Maybe then she'll throw another fit or two.

"You tell her I sometimes bring along the Ranee's trunk when she goes on a tour o' the country, so's the Ranee 'll have a change o' clothing if she travels too fast for her crew. You say, it may be I might open up the Ranee's trunk if I was asked. Get that?"

"But, *sahib*, she is a she-devil. What if she does not run? She is likely to fight Asoka with her silk umbrella."

"All right. Better tell off two or three men to 'tend to it that she runs. Let 'em give her the bum's rush—nothing rough, you understand, but plumb persuasive."

"When is this to happen?"

"Quick and snappy. Get a move on now, afore the moon rises and spoils the circus."

Quorn's mahouts were breathless when he told them to take part in a deception. They were so used to his detecting and punishing their own constant attempts to get away with everything from theft to mayhem that a so-to-speak request performance stirred in them almost too much lawless zeal.

They armed themselves with sticks and bits of corrugated iron for making godless noises, pulled off their turbans and let their long hair straggle, offered countless idiotic suggestions of how to stage the show more horribly, made altogether too many torches of rags on sticks soaked in expensive kerosene, and at last submitted to being told exactly what to do.

The first thing they were made to do was to fasten all the elephants securely, with chains on both hind feet, because the noise was likely to send the whole long line into a panic.

Then there was the camp of quarrymen to be considered. Quorn sent for the foreman and told him to keep his men inside the long iron shed. But that was not enough; one foreman and a few assistants might not be able to control so many.

"Tell 'em the dacoits are coming to capture me. Say the magic what I'll make might send more than dacoits to Hades. Bid 'em lie still."

THAT was better, but it might stir curiosity. One needs not be a quarryman in order to wish to see dacoits sent by magical means to the lower regions where they belong. Quorn wanted the absolute minimum number of witnesses; it was bad enough to have to trust mahouts to give no names away. So he sent his own cook with a message to Rana Raj Singh, inviting him to come galloping up with his Rajputs in order to keep the quarrymen within their iron walls.

"Tell him I'm acting on a bright idee and say I'm counting on him to do exac'ly what I ask."

Then he loosed Asoka, mounted him and waited until he heard the distant drum-beat of the hoofs of Rana Raj Singh's horsemen.

"Holy mackerel! If India had fifty men like him, that one and the Ranee 'u'd be the emperor and empress! Me, I'd get myself a harem and be a twenty-one gun rajah... Now, boys—soon as you hear me yell, you cut loose like a lot o' hell-cats."

When he did yell his voice nearly cracked. He remembered the little red schoolhouse days in Pennsylvania, when he and the rest of them played Indian and hookey, burning a farmer's hayrick and doing so much glorious mischief that the punishment afterward made them all feel like heroes.

Memory reproduced the old sensation. It conveyed itself by subtle processes along the nerves of Quorn's legs to the much more sensitive nerves behind Asoka's ears. The elephant became aware of mischief that would please his master and the long trunk straightened itself, sampling the air, before it curled up out of harm's way.

The timing and the din were perfect. Half a dozen whirling torches broke the black night into bewildering shadow. All the elephants except Asoka became frantic and screamed as they tugged at their doubled chains. Two mahouts, left for that purpose, all the mahouts' wives, and all their naked children rushed up and down the long line, shouting and commanding.

Quorn's men yelled their heads off, beating on their scraps of iron and prancing like idiots. Rana Raj Singh's horsemen, making no other sound than the hoof-beats, came on through the darkness like an avalanche of ghosts. The torches led the way; by their light and the bobbing and swaying of Bamjee's lantern Quorn saw some one in a long white shroud go fluttering between two men into abysmal night.

"Soak it to her good!" he ordered. "Smash that tent, you big bum!"

There was nothing in the whole world easier than to set Asoka smashing things. The difficulty was to stop him. Down went the tent in a bedlam of splintering poles. Crash went Asoka's forefoot through an open wardrobe trunk; it shut on his foot like a trap and offended him; he stamped it into pulp. Then the bed with its incomprehensible tangle of springs and folding framework angered him; he knelt on it, knew by its dying twang that it was something sinful, and abolished it with awful thoroughness, flinging the offending mattress sky-high and then hurling fragments of the frame to right and left.

That settled, he became aware of ox-carts standing with their poles in air; he shook the poles and the ox-carts came to pieces. He saw Bamjee's tent and flattened that. He broke and utterly abolished all the belongings and all the tents of Mrs. Galway's horde of servants.

Then he sought fresh fields to conquer; it was not often that Quorn encouraged him to break things; he would make the best of the unexpected picnic.

But the heavy *ankus* in Quorn's right hand steadied the monster at last. There was too much noise—altogether too much shouting near the elephant lines—too many torches. Quorn heard the sound of many more than two score horsemen. Through the clamor and din he could hear the thwack of sabers; he saw the dancing torchlight flash on steel—and suddenly he heard the voice of Rana Raj Singh rallying his men.

"DACOITS!" Quorn gasped. "Holy mackerel! Them suckers come to pinch my elephant, I'll bet a year's pay! Steady, lad—steady—no use running thirty ways to come

—steady, you ijjit!—gimme a chance to see what's doing—stan' still, durn you!"

Then the moon came up from behind a mountain, like a luminous amber lozenge on a blue enamel wall, suffusing half the camp in yellow light. Quorn on Asoka was still in shadow.

He could see a big party of dacoits, mounted on terrified ponies, gathering to resist a charge by Rana Raj Singh's men, who were only shadows forming in a solid phalanx somewhere near the place where Mrs. Galway's tent had stood. There was a line where the moonlight left off—all gloom on the hither side of it, all glow beyond.

Quorn edged Asoka toward that borderland. Then he heard what might have been a bugle note, but it was Rana Raj Singh challenging his Rajputs to charge into thrice their number.

"Now for your college yell, buddy! Us is the guns as saves this here picnic!"

Simultaneously, Rana Raj Singh and his horsemen, and Quorn on Asoka—two converging terrors—shot forth from the shadow straight at the heart of the rallying dacoit gang. Asoka's blood-palsying scream so scared the horses that even the Rajputs checked, and there was a low-voiced, cursing jingle-and-stab of spurs, clatter of colliding scabbards, kicking, plunging. Then forward, Asoka leading now by fifteen paces and moving like a five-ton cannon ball.

The dacoits ran. They melted like the sparks from a fire that vanish in the night, scattering in search of deeper darkness until they and night were one. But not all escaped.

Rana Raj Singh and his men cut down a dozen of them with the old-style saber-stroke that splits a fugitive from crown to chin and leaves the saber clear for more work, as a thrust seldom does. And Asoka overtook a fleeing horse, who swerved as his wild eye saw the straining trunk lick out of darkness, and spilled his rider.

The rider just missed being trampled on; he rolled and then crawled behind a rock, where a Rajput skewered him through the neck, as one splits tent-pegs at a tournament.

It took time to restore Asoka's mood to one of calm, superior dignity. He wanted to pursue. The fever of his strength was in him. By the time he was under control the Rajputs had gathered the dead and wounded, including two of their own men seriously hurt by knife-thrusts. Rana Raj Singh was examining them as best he could by lamp-light.

There were eleven dacoits slain and three so badly wounded that their death seemed certain. One other was badly hurt and groaning, but likely to recover. Between groans he could give an account of himself and there were two Rajputs putting him to question; in the darkness none but he could tell whether or not they added to his pain at intervals to make him talkative, but between groans his answers came in a hurry.

RANA RAJ SINGH looked up from examining his wounded men and his teeth flashed white in the lantern light as he grinned at Quorn.

"Any antiseptic in your tent? Good, I will find it. You had better go looking for beauty in distress. Was this just luck, or did you know dacoits were coming?"

"'Tweren't luck," said Quorn, "it was just my ignorance. Hark! That 'll be my prohibition sweetheart singin' for a shot o' water!"

Agonized yells for help in a high-pitched feminine voice were repeated rapidly from several hundred yards away. They sounded much too angry to be symptoms of genuine danger.

"Would you pass me a bottle o' hooch, sir, out o' the lock-box by Asoka's stall? Here's the key—can you catch it? Thank you—either sort will do—rye or Scotch, it's all one. Yeh, I can get the cork out. Me and my Bucephalus will now ride forth and rescue the fire-breathin' virgin. If you could pull your freight, sir, 'fore we come along, you'll miss a funny scene, I don't doubt, but it might be tactics not to be here."

"What is she wearing?"

"Dunno, sir. Here's hoping. Cheerio, and thank you for the help. Come on, Asoka, head for that there noise o' nightingales."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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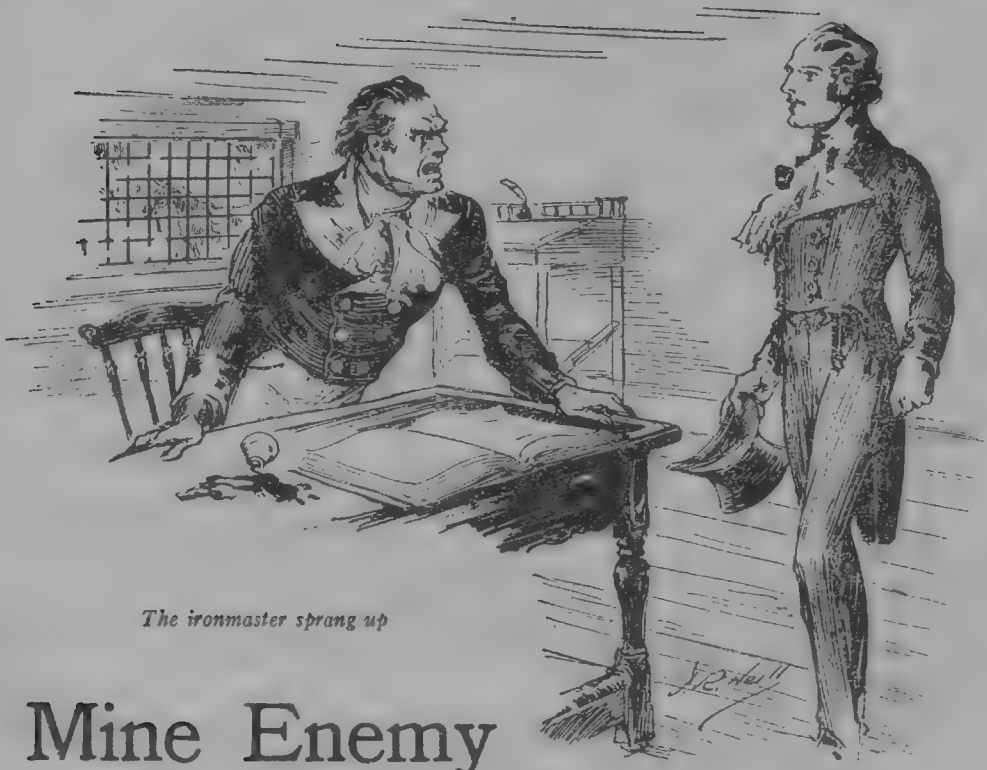
A Haunted Ship

A FEW old windjammers are still in commission, among them the Manitou—but not under that name; and thereby hangs a tale. Bound from Acapulco to Portland, Oregon, she had a sailmaker who had as pet a big gray cat, which followed him about like a dog, perched on his shoulder at mess, shared his rations, slept in his bunk at night and sat on the bench beside him all day while he stitched sails. The cat resented all overtures from the crew with teeth and claws.

A young Dutchman, known only as Hans, was no friend of the sailmaker; and toward Hans the cat was especially vicious. One dark and stormy night "Sails" fell from the topsail yard and was instantly killed. No sooner had the body been committed to the sea than the cat strangely transferred her affections to Hans. One morning Hans was found asleep in the sail-locker on the floor and was in a dazed condition when awakened. He declared that he had followed the sailmaker and cat from his bunk to the sail-room in the night. This happened three nights in succession, and Hans went to the sick bay raving in delirium.

A reign of terror seized the ship. The cat disappeared, but uncanny noises between decks testified to her presence in the ship. In the hope of "laying the ghost" the mate and two sailors watched one night in the sail-room. In less than an hour they rushed out in a panic, swearing they had seen "Sails" with the cat on his shoulder. The men were afraid to go to sleep below, and talked of abandoning the Manitou and taking to the boats, when one dark night the cat suddenly ran on deck, yowling and spitting. The captain was called, but she scampered up the rigging to the topmast yard from which her master had fallen, and with one last ear-splitting wail leaped in the sea.

Hans recovered, and there was peace on the vessel, but at Portland every man deserted save the officers, and it was impossible to ship a crew until she was repainted and renamed. She still sails the seas, but no cat is ever permitted aboard, nor will owners or officers ever admit that she was once the Manitou. *Minna Irving.*



The ironmaster sprang up

Mine Enemy

When two men dispute over a square of land there is no end of trouble; but trouble or not, Jeffrey Camden would rather starve than part with the last of the Camden estate

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

THERE were men moving strangely through the brush in the ledge-broken pasture of Jeffrey Camden's lake farm. Camden saw them as he rode up to a high point in the roadway; and immediately he pulled in his big chestnut horse, to sit watching those dark figures as they prowled among the junipers and the granite outcrops of his land. Their errand was an evil-looking mystery which he could not guess.

Given a coat of chain mail and a steel cap Jeffrey would have looked much like one of his ancestors, the one who had struck the Saxons mightily with a great two-handed sword at Hastings. Across the span of nearly eight hundred years had come the strong nose, the fierce eye and proud carriage of the Norman strain.

But Jeffrey Camden wore a coat of dark blue cloth, cut in at the waist and set with fine horn buttons. His long legs were clothed in pantaloons of cream color, strapped tightly under boots which had been polished to perfection by his one servant that morning. A tall beaver hat was cocked in the manner of the Eighteen-Thirties.

Camden's blue eye, now turned dark with wrath, swept the wind-whipped waters of Lake Champlain for a sail to explain the men who were nosing over his property. His first thought had been of smugglers, whose well handled sloops and schooners practically defied the customs officers at the Canadian border. But there was no craft anchored, or hovering about.

A mouth that could be kind grew hard and Jeffrey Camden, without giving a thought to his utter lack of a weapon, turned the superb chestnut and put him over a stone wall at the roadside. Horse and man hurled themselves in a reckless, breakneck charge upon the dozen or more broad-shouldered fellows clustered among the rocks.

The men heard and saw him, and they had bunched together by the time he reached them. Camden swung to the ground and faced as hard-bitten a crew as he had seen in the north country. Every man had a short-handled sledge or a crowbar in his hand, and many of them carried rock fragments as big as their fists.

They stood in a silence which seemed insolent to Jeffrey. Here and there a man shifted his chew of tobacco; sent a brown stream to stain a juniper. Their butternut-dyed shirts and blue jeans proclaimed them workmen. Camden looked for a leader and found none.

"Damnation!" he roared, at last. "What are you doing on my land? I'm Camden, of Ledge Hill! Are you all tongue-tied?"

As though in answer to his question another man appeared, of little or no kinship with the others. He wore a tailed and tight-waisted coat like Camden's, and his stock and linen were as fine, but here the resemblance ended. This man was taller and broader; a very bulldog in his middle years. His jaw was like the cliffs that bordered the lake; his mouth a grim line. Jeffrey knew him for his neighbor, Darius Sterling, the ironmaster.

"These are my men," said Sterling, in a harsh voice which was neither hostile nor friendly.

"Then, sir," exclaimed Camden furiously, "perhaps you'll explain why they're prodding about on my land with hammers and bars. Who gave you leave?"

"I am taking samples of the rock for an assay," replied Sterling, still unmoved. "There's iron ore here. If the percentage is high enough it will pay to work this field."

"Did I say I wanted an assay made?" Jeffrey folded his arms. "Sterling, the ironmaster, I believe! Sterling, the devil, for all I care. Take your men back where they came from!"

IN the weathered cheeks of the older man grew a slow red, but his voice did not change.

"If this ore assays as I think it will I'll buy the land from you, Camden, for enough to get you a dozen such fields. Aye, farms, perhaps."

"This," said Jeffrey, "is the last of the Camden land and I am the last of the race. It has been ours since King Philip's War. It will remain Camden land, sir!"

"Little enough to keep out of three thousand acres," said Sterling.

"And you've got most of it, by foreclosure and sale!" Jeffrey Camden was now touched in his tenderest spot. He did not care to be reminded that two generations before him had wasted their substance.

"But honestly, young man."

"I grant you that."

"And I'll give you ten thousand for the Ledge Hill property," said the ironmaster.

Camden's fists clenched.

"You have a forge on the Bouquet River, Sterling, where you smelt ore and hammer out billets of iron, and a store for your workmen, and houses for them, I believe?"

"You know that."

"Then be content with your ironmaking. Ledge Hill is not for sale!"

There was an indirect insult here. Darius Sterling had been born of a superior but poor farmer's family. When Jeffrey Camden had been riding to select school, with a groom behind, Sterling had been learning the art of hammering great glowing blooms of iron into the billets and pigs of commerce.

For the first time Sterling showed the rage that must have been seething within him; showed it by more than the brick-like color that had mounted to his cheeks. He took a step forward. Instantly the workmen closed up. Jeffrey looked into a semicircle of scowling faces; saw hairy arms curved and ready to strike. He met the gaze of each man eye to eye, and most of them looked away. Then he laughed in the face of Darius Sterling.

"Unleash your mongrels!" he said. "No doubt their dirty faces have never had the honor of meeting a gentleman's fist!"

Only the quick action of Sterling stopped their rush. He whirled around and held out both arms, and he bellowed so that the startled horse danced a little *pas seul* upon the turf.

"Get back! This is my quarrel."

By the force of what Darius Sterling was, the men were stopped. Jeffrey had waited, with the gleam of naked steel in his eyes. When he saw that the charge was checked he laughed again, and flicked them with another whiplash sentence.

"They go to heel well, Sterling."

Slowly Sterling turned. His eyes were as cold as the lake in autumn.

"Camden," he said, "I'm going to have this ore."

"Take it if you can, ironmaster."

The chestnut, Nick, was trained to follow and his nose was now close to the shoulder of his rider. Jeffrey put hand to pommel and vaulted to the saddle. His feet found the stirrups. He leaned forward.

"If ever I want anything from you, Sterling, I shall take it!"

A TOUCH of the heels and the chestnut drove straight at the little group of men. It was the last thing any of them, even Sterling, had expected, and they were scattered like wind-blown straws. Jeffrey rode through them laughing, and turned to swing his beaver as Nick went bounding up the hill. He saw the ironmaster standing tall and straight, hatless, like a figure carved from native granite against the background of the sparkling lake.

The smart of Jeffrey Camden's anger was a little eased; but not the dull ache that was in him day and night. That he covered as well as he could with reckless laughter and a defiance of all the world. He had come home from the Grand Tour in Europe to find his father dying and himself with no inheritance but a few acres and a big stone house. He was a man brought up short by a sudden blow; but brought to his toes, not laid on his back. Jeffrey was fitted for two things: the army, or the management of an estate. He was almost landless and his country was not at war. It appeared that he

must sell Ledge Hill in order to buy a commission in Europe.

HIS way took him through a fragment of his own woodland, and even this reminded him of his poverty. All the first-growth timber had been cut and rafted to Canada. There was nothing here but wood for the many fireplaces of his house. He was staring bitterly down the green aisle, brown-carpeted, which was the highway, when a sudden drum of hoof beats from behind brought him around in the saddle.

There was only time for him to see a big black come thundering down the road, to realize that the huddled figure clinging to the horse was a woman. He spoke to Nick, pulled out to the wheel track, and in another moment they were traveling neck and neck with the runaway.

Jeffrey saw the eye of the animal and knew that it was vicious; suspected it to be one of those rare horses that are killers. Nick and he could have brought a merely frightened runaway to a standstill without trouble. He glanced at the girl on the sidesaddle. Her foot had slipped from the stirrup, but her other leg was still over the saddle horn. A face more angry than scared looked up to him.

Camden caught the bridle just above the bit and, leaning over, tried to bring the black horse down to a gallop. The animal fought him; tried to bite. But Nick knew his part and gradually lessened his own pace, dragging with all his weight against the head of the other horse. Jeffrey's arm was nearly wrenched out at the shoulder socket, but at the end of a mile the black was walking.

Jeffrey dismounted and tied him to a tree with a short rein. Then, for the first time, he gave his attention to the girl. A pair of brown eyes that sparkled with deep lights of amber looked down at him; a great mass of brown hair with streaks of red-gold flashing in it had fallen around the shoulders of a tight bodice. The girl was just in the process of adjusting the enormously long skirt of her habit over a creamy sea of lace and linen.

"I've never drunk to more dangerous eyes," said Jeffrey, "or a prettier leg!"

Instantly her face became crimson; instantly her eyes seemed to emit sparks. Somehow she had managed to keep hold of her riding whip. She brought it down across Camden's cheek. It was highly indecorous to speak of a young lady's leg in the Nineteenth Century. Jeffrey laughed.

"I assure you," he said, "that admiration turned my head for a moment. Dismount, please."

"If you had not saved my life I'd have you horsewhipped!" she cried, in a strangled voice. "No one has ever dared speak to me like that!"

"Will you dismount?" asked Camden. "That beast you've been riding isn't safe for a man. I'm going to take you home on my horse."

"I will not dismount! Untie my horse, sir."

Jeffrey reached up a pair of very powerful arms and lifted her clear of the saddle. She came to earth in a cascade of kicking legs and lace-trimmed underskirts. No sooner had her feet touched the ground than she twisted, cat-quick, and sank little white teeth into Camden's hand. He lifted the bleeding hand to his lips and touched the wound.

"There'll be a scar that I shall cherish all my life," he said.

"Which won't be for long, I hope,"

she panted. "Some one is certain to shoot you."

JEFFREY CAMDEN was happier than he had been since he came home to the Adirondack wilderness; happier than he had ever been. This girl, who stood only a little higher than his heart, was all his heart desired.

"I've never seen you before," he said, ignoring her prophecy. "Where have you come from?"

He was smiling; there was a light in his eyes. At times like this he was almost good-looking.

"From—from boarding school," she stammered. "Will you put me back on my horse, sir? From school in Philadelphia. I'm home now."

"Yes, you're home," he said. "I am Jeffrey Camden, of Ledge Hill."

"The one they call 'Lord Jeffrey'?" she murmured, involuntarily. "And 'Lucifer.'"

A subtle change had come into her eyes, her voice. Jeffrey made a swift decision.

"That's of no importance," he said. "I have the honor of asking you to be my wife. If you will tell me your father's name I'll speak to him properly at once."

Tears of pain, or shame, filled the girl's eyes. She half raised the whip.

"You looked like a gentleman!" she sobbed. "I liked you. And you ridicule me."

Instantly Camden dropped to a knee in the dust of the road. He raised her hand, staining it with the blood she had drawn.

"I never spoke in better faith," he said, in a low voice. "I loved you before I took you down from the saddle. You are the only woman I've ever wanted to marry."

It was impossible not to believe him. But she could not know that this proposal after an acquaintance of ten minutes was as characteristic of Jeffrey Camden as his fanatical devotion to his land, his fierce pride.

"I must believe you," she told him, after a moment. "But—but I'm confused. Oh—"

"Tell me your name." Jeffrey had sense enough to press her no further at the moment. He stood up, knowing that he had won.

"I'm Janice Sterling," she said. "You must know my father, Darius Sterling."

A pistol ball could hardly have dealt him a stouter blow. Of all the fathers in the county she had to have that one! He felt himself trembling.

"Your father is my enemy," he said, soberly, "but in spite of him, or you, or any other earthly things I'm going to marry you."

"Your enemy?" she repeated, wide-eyed. "I thought the ironmaster, Fenn Clinton, was his only enemy."

FOR a minute Jeffrey Camden hesitated, arranging his thoughts. He wanted to tell the truth, to overcome his own prejudice, and above all not to hurt her.

"Darius Sterling is a strong man," he said, "and he has risen in power as my family has gone down. Camden farms and timber and ore land are now his; the water rights of the Bouquet River and our wharf on the lake. All honestly, child. He is above meanness or trickery. But he is a hard man. I shall have to take you. He will never give you to me."

Her face was stricken as she understood something of what he was trying to tell her. Gone was the little vixen who had bitten him.

"Sir," she began, slowly, "if—if it should be that—more comes of this offer of marriage, I know my father will not deny me the right to make my own choice."

"You do not know your father," he told her. "If I were sure it would be for your happiness I'd take you with me to Ledge Hill now."

Her eyes grew soft and warm, as Jeffrey had not seen them, and ribbons of pink waved in her cheeks. He was ready to fight Sterling and an army of bloomers and coal stags; his arms ached to take her into them.

"But I love my father!"

Some kind angel gave Jeffrey Camden light to see that Darius Sterling might be loved. He made a gesture of renunciation.

"I'll take you home now, Janice. But I shall come for you as soon as he refuses me."

He changed saddles with a watchful eye on the black. Then she was in his arms for a moment as he lifted her up to Nick's back. Her eyes were shining as she gathered up the reins.

"If he refuses," she said, in a small voice, "come *very* soon!"

She leaned down and touched her lips to his forehead; then Nick was away at a canter. Camden followed her instantly on the black, but it took all of his horsemanship and all the power of his arm to keep the animal subdued. There was no chance to talk until they drew up at the house of Darius Sterling.

It was a long, rambling structure, with fine grounds, and the record of the ironmaster's increasing prosperity written in the additions to the house and the great cluster of barns and stables on the opposite side of the highway. A stable hand came at a jog trot.

"Change saddles," ordered Camden. "Miss Sterling is not to ride the black any more."

The man gaped at him, and sprang to obey. Jeffrey turned to Janice. He took her hand, and stood looking into her eyes as though he would take something from them with him when he rode away.

"Until—" he said.

"Until . . ." she repeated after him, in a whisper.

A MOMENT later he was pounding back the way he had come, but now it was not toward Ledge Hill that he urged Nick. He left the turnpike and followed a well traveled road, built on a base of furnace slag, that was shaped to the windings of the Bouquet. Where the stream met the lake lay the wharf that had once belonged to the Camdens, and the forge that Darius Sterling had built. There also were the ironmaster's store and blacksmith shop, and the houses of his workmen.

Nick picked his way along the single street, among children and dogs. Camden brought him up at the broad porch of the store. He dismounted and went into the cool, dim interior, where bolts of cloth filled the shelves on one side and groceries on the other. Two long counters ran the length of the store, to the office at the rear.

Through a window in the office wall Camden saw the head of Sterling, bending over a ledger. He knocked and entered the room. Then the ironmaster looked up, and again his eyes took on the color of cold lake waters. Jeffrey stood straight and defiant, but for an instant there was within him a willingness to clasp hands with this man who was the father of Janice.

"Sir," he said, "since I saw you last I have had the honor of meeting your

daughter. I have come to ask for her hand in marriage."

There was a long silence, so long that it might have broken the self-control of lesser men. At length Darius Sterling moved, laid down his quill pen, and pushed the ledger away over the green baize top of his secretary.

"I have long thought that the Camdens were a little mad," he said. "You know, of course, what my answer is?"

"I suppose it is a refusal."

"Then why did you come here?"

"Because I owed it to Janice, to you, and to myself, sir. I could do nothing less than speak to you before I marry her."

"Before you marry her!" echoed Sterling. He swung around in his chair and stared out through a window for a moment before he turned back to Camden. It was as though he were arranging the details of his decision.

"I am to understand that you do not approve, of course?" asked Jeffrey.

"I would much rather see her married to one of my workmen than to any Camden," replied Sterling, calmly. "I shall this day ride to the county seat and have my lawyer put my affairs in the legal form I desire. Then I shall be free to kill you if you persist in this. The law troubles me very little, but for the killing of a Camden I may have to give account. So be it! Horses, dogs, men and women you Camdens bend to your desires. If you have mesmerized my daughter I shall have a guard set over her. That is all. Get out!"

Jeffrey Camden bowed from the waist.

"Duelling is a generation out of fashion," he said, "but if you were not the father of Janice I should challenge you. As it is your person is safe. But I'll ride you down, ironmaster, and take your daughter!"

He turned and walked from the office; but not without seeing that the hand of Sterling dropped to a drawer, raised a long-barreled pistol, and slowly lowered it.

Camden rode out of Sterling Forge and turned toward Ledge Hill. If he went for Janice now there might ever be in her mind the thought that she could have won her father. Jeffrey knew the folly of this; knew, on the other hand, that by waiting even an hour he gave Darius Sterling time to hedge his house with guards. However, better the guards to overcome than any bitterness in the soul of Janice.

THE Camden House rose gray and forbidding above the lake. It was something like an aged veteran standing at attention, with a spirit that triumphed over years and poverty. As Jeffrey came up to the stone horseblock the great black walnut front door opened and a tall, white-haired man with a scarred face came out. He wore a tailed coat over a butternut shirt and still achieved dignity as he hobbled down from the pillared veranda.

"I'm sorry not to come from the stables, as I should, Mr. Jeffrey," he said. "But I was gettin' dinner when I seed ye from the kitchen winder."

"Malachi," said Jeffrey, "if you don't stop putting on airs I'll challenge you under London prize ring rules! I'm going to stable Nick myself."

"And I'll give ye a go in the ring, yet!" chuckled Malachi. "But I ain't quite as good as I was when I fought the 'Baltimore Oriole' forty-seven rounds!"

"What's for dinner?" asked Jeffrey, who had heard the story of the great bare-knuckle fight at least twenty times.

"Corn bread, sir. They's naught else. Phinney ain't come with the rent that's due. Nor the other farmer, Benson, ain't brought that young pig he promised."

"Aye," said Jeffrey, with a suppressed groan. "And my stomach's sunk to my backbone! But Phinney's had a sick child and Benson sprained his ankle. We'll have to wait for the money, but we can get the pig by going after it."

"Then I'm for it to-morrow, sir," growled Malachi. "A roasted loin would taste lickin' good!"

Jeffrey went to the stables, leading Nick. For the first time it struck him that he would have brought a bride home to corn bread and water if he had taken Janice Sterling this day. But he was willing to take oath that she would have eaten it gayly with him. They were of the same spirit; he had known that instinctively.

He looked up at the gray walls of Camden House. For Janice he might part with it. And in knowing that he might do this, he knew that he loved her more than anything between the heavens above and the earth beneath.

JEFFREY had eaten that evening generously of corn bread and salt from fragile china, by the light of candles in silver candlesticks, when Malachi entered in a state of rare excitement and announced a visitor.

"Mr. Fenn Clinton to see you, sir! I showed him into the great parlor."

"Clinton?" exclaimed Jeffrey, rising. "Ah, yes! Are there candles for the parlor, Malachi?"

"Leave everythin' to me, Mr. Jeffrey!" whispered the old prize fighter, hoarsely. "Did you think I was going to let us be caught by guests without light?"

Camden smiled as he left the dining room and went along the hallway, from which stairs with mahogany treads and banisters rose to the darkness of the upper floors. He entered a high room where there was light enough to flash on mirrors framed in gilt scrollwork, but not so much that it revealed the threadbare spots in the silk damask of the furniture.

A tall, cadaverous, dry-looking man was standing by the fireplace. He had posed himself in a precise attitude, his coat was buttoned with exactness, and even his gestures were as though they had been outlined by a draftsman. He advanced with a lean hand outstretched. Camden did not like the dank black hair that curled down upon a too high stock, nor the pale eyes under black brows. But this was a guest in his house.

"Mr. Camden, I presume," said the stranger. "I am Fenn Clinton. I have a forge property on the Dunder River, in the next township. I have not had the pleasure of meeting you."

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Jeffrey, taking for a moment cold fingers. "I place you now. You are one of the ironmasters. Be seated, sir."

A door at the rear of the room opened and Malachi entered with his best manner and a tray bearing a whisky decanter, glasses, and a handful of cigars. So that was why the last box of cigars had disappeared so rapidly! Malachi had been laying them away for possible guests. Camden had thought there was nothing to drink or smoke in the house.

Mr. Clinton lighted a cigar, and drank sparingly. His pale eyes remained fixed upon Jeffrey's face almost to the point of rudeness. At last, after a few amenities, he spoke his errand.

"I have heard, sir," he said, "that

you box and wrestle, and handle the saber well. Every one speaks of the Camden horsemanship, and it is said that your personal servant is a former prize fighter. Let me say, sir, that my seeming curiosity has an object."

"At least it's true that Malachi was once a prize fighter," said Camden, wondering.

"It is a little difficult to make my proposition to a gentleman," remarked Clinton, slowly. "I ask you not to take offense."

"Why, I am not one to take offense when a man approaches me in your evident spirit of friendliness, sir!" exclaimed Jeffrey.

"Very well." Clinton considered the end of his cigar. "I need a leader for some men, and it is better that I myself do not appear in the affair."

"Ah!" Jeffrey sank back in his chair. Perhaps he was going to make some money. Many a captain had sold his sword to an honorable cause. "I'm ready to listen, Mr. Clinton."

FENN CLINTON leaned forward. A strange light appeared in his eyes.

"I have fifty bargemen, roustabouts, and the like on a schooner standing offshore not far from here," he said. "They were to have gone on an undertaking for me to-night, but the leader fell overboard. And he was too drunk to swim. Now I've got my men gathered and primed for action, but there isn't one of them of the caliber to lead, to hold the others together. I'm desperate. I lack a man they'll follow into a fight. I thought of your reputation and came ashore in a small boat. I'm prepared to offer you a thousand dollars for a few hours' work."

"And the undertaking, sir?" asked Camden.

"Darius Sterling has a contract with a Troy foundry to deliver pig iron. He won't be able to fill it if his hammers are smashed, his furnaces damaged, and his buildings set on fire. You understand that anything may happen in a drunken fight between two gangs of forgemen. They're always at that sort of thing. And if Sterling fails to deliver the iron I have been promised the chance. It is generally understood that you and he are enemies. Some of his men are in my pay. You will, of course, disguise yourself in old clothes, and you may even withdraw after the affair is well started."

Jeffrey rose and pulled the bell cord. Instantly Malachi appeared.

"Mr. Clinton is going," he said. "Show him out, please."

The visitor was on his feet, if possible more unpleasantly pale than he had been. He spoke in a voice that had thickened perceptibly:

"You've had my confidence, damn you!"

"I have already forgotten your name, sir," answered Jeffrey. "You did me the honor to say that you were dealing with a gentleman."

THE great front door closed gently under the hand of Malachi. He came back into the parlor. Camden stood where his brief visitor had left him, with a head whirling full of thoughts.

"Malachi," he said, "how are your joints?"

"Limber, if they's trouble brewin', Mr. Jeffrey."

"Will the mare carry you, riding hard?"

"Aye, as far as she can, sir."

"Then saddle her. Saddle Nick. And follow me as well as you can."

Malachi vanished. Jeffrey ran whistling upstairs to load his pistols. When he came down he heard the crunch of hoofs outside, and the old man stepped briskly into the hallway.

"Horses are at the door, sir. I'll put out the candles."

Camden remembered a breastplate and headpiece, and a long basket-hilt rapier that hung on the wall of the library. He brought out the rapier. It set well in his hand. The two hundred-year-old steel was bright with care.

"We're for Darius Sterling's house first," he told Malachi.

A minute more and they were in the saddle, galloping into as pretty a moon-filled night as ever came to the Lake Champlain country. The rapier turned to a silver wand.

Jeffrey was far in the lead when he reached the house of Sterling. He halted at the gate in the white picket fence where he had left Janice that morning and instantly a dark figure stepped out from the shadow of a gate-post.

"Who's there?"

"Some one to see Mr. Sterling at once, on important business," answered Jeffrey. The guard stepped close, peering upward, with a cocked pistol in his hand.

"You mightn't be Camden, of Ledge Hill?" he asked.

The man was on Nick's left side. The naked rapier leaped over the pommel and its point sent the pistol sailing into the air before the guard could press finger to trigger. Jeffrey slid down upon his shoulders, and with both hands took that astonished sentry by the neck. The breath rasped once in his throat and he wilted down.

Jeffrey rose, and found his sword. Sterling must be at home, for the house was lighted from top to bottom. He went up to the front door, opened it, and stepped into a spacious hallway. A pillowy, middle-aged woman had just set one foot on the stairs. At sight of Camden the dishes on a tray that she carried began to slide together.

"Lord save us!" she gasped.

"Is Mr. Sterling at home?" asked Jeffrey.

Dumb with fright, the woman stared at his sword. Then she found her tongue.

"He was throwed by the black horse!" she chattered. "Oh, Lord save us!"

Jeffrey brushed past her and leaped up the stairs. Then her shrieks were let loose in the house, but Camden did not even glance backward. He was concerned with the doors of the upper hallway. One was ajar, with a bright light showing. He thrust it open and stepped into the chamber of Darius Sterling.

AGAINST the high, massed pillows the great shoulders of Sterling seemed even broader than they had in his black coat. He was alone in the room. His grim head turned at the sound of Camden's step. Into his eyes came something deadly, and one of the powerful hands that lay on the feather-stitched quilt rose. It held a pistol. The lock clicked as the hammer raised under the thumb of the iron-master. He took steady aim at the breast of his visitor.

"Fifty men are on their way to burn Sterling Forge to-night," said Jeffrey.

For a space of seconds the pistol remained leveled. Then slowly it went down to the quilt. The face of Darius Sterling had not changed, but the threat of death had gone from his eyes.

"Are you here to taunt me?" he asked, in a strong voice.

"Do you think that ill of my race?"

"No," answered the ironmaster. "I was wrong. Whose men are coming?"

"The name is in confidence, but not the fact," said Jeffrey. "The men are on the lake now, probably already standing in for the mouth of the Bouquet and your wharf."

"I can guess the name." Sterling moved, and groaned. "I didn't think Fenn Clinton would dare this. Pull the bell cord! That cursed black horse of mine broke three ribs for me to-day. But they'll have to get me to the forge."

"You might give me safe conduct out of the house," said Jeffrey, with his hand on the cord. "I had to choke your man at the gate to get in."

"Aye!" The ironmaster lifted his voice and roared. "Damnation! Where are the snails?"

The stairs creaked and a man almost as big as Darius Sterling himself bounded into the room, followed by the woman who had screamed. Jeffrey backed away, lifting his point.

"Mr. Camden has brought warning of a raid on the forge," said Sterling. "Get out the light carriage, Mike, and fill it with pillows. Get my pistols and a shotgun. You and I are going."

It was evident that the man Mike was used to Darius Sterling. He turned without a word or another glance at Jeffrey and left the room on a run.

"They'll land north of the river," said Camden, "either at the wharf or on the beach. The shore's too rocky on the south side."

"Yes," agreed Sterling. The woman was helping him, with infinite care, to sit up. "And cross the bridge to the forge. And ruin me in twenty minutes' time! But my men will hold the bridge if I can get there in time to warn them."

"They'd hardly listen to me," said Jeffrey.

"They'd shoot you," replied the ironmaster, grimly. "They have their orders."

"Ah, well!" laughed Jeffrey, turning toward the door. "My compliments to Janice, sir."

"Where are you going?" bellowed Sterling.

"To hold the bridge!"

CAMDEN heard the voice of Sterling roaring after him as he ran down the stairs. In the road before the gate he saw the dim shape of another horse beside Nick. A voice spoke from the darkness.

"I had to stay out here and set on this cuss, Mr. Jeffrey, but I knowed you could get along all right by yourself once you was inside."

Malachi rose from the prostrate guard. He followed Jeffrey to horse.

"I'll be on the bridge when you come, Malachi, with more trouble than I'll want. I'll need you!"

"Aye, sir!"

They were away into the night. Jeffrey let Nick out, and the stout-hearted chestnut flattened down to the road. The wind whistled. The forest sped reeling past.

The skies over Sterling Forge were red from the fiery chimneys and there were lights in the hamlet when Jeffrey went through it. He heard a shot and a shout; then he was on the highway again with the river gleaming at his right and the misty lake ahead. The masts of a schooner rode against the bright heavens.

The bridge was built of timbers hewn out with the broad-ax and set together by honest workmen. The planked sides rose shoulder high to a tall man, and the flooring was three-

inch oak. A gang of workmen could not have destroyed it in time to check the threat that was gathering at the wharf. Dark blots moved there in the moonlight, and a raucous murmur grew.

The blots became a moving mass along the road. It would not take Clinton's men long to cover the few hundred yards which lay between the lake and the bridge. Jeffrey remained mounted, on his own side of the river, at the bridgehead. His pistols, for emergencies, were in the waistband of his pantaloons. At present he was going to depend on Nick and the rapier.

The bunched raiding party came up to the bridgehead on the opposite side without seeing him, for he had backed his horse into the shadows. But as the first footfalls reverberated on the planking Jeffrey charged. Nick bounded half a dozen times his own length and struck the oncoming men like a tornado.

Fourteen hundred-odd pounds of horseflesh sprayed men right and left against the sides of the bridge, hurled them rolling back along the road, stretched them out motionless under the trampling feet of their companions. Jeffrey brought Nick up short. The horse wheeled and turned, as light as a dancing master, and charged again.

For the second time Clinton's men were ridden down, and Jeffrey was back on his own side of the bridge. But they were closing up, and after him. A pistol flashed out of the shadows. He lunged with the rapier and a man went squealing back the way he had come. The others retreated and for a moment the bridge was clear, except for two or three dark figures which did not move.

But now the shock of surprise had passed and they could see that there was only a single horseman against them. The men rallied to a tall form and Jeffrey guessed that Fenn Clinton, in desperation, had led his own forces. Orange fire lanced out from the raiders and Camden heard the whistle of bullets as they gathered to come on again. Jeffrey charged.

THIS time they gave way, and suffered less. Camden tried to turn on the bridge. Nick reared and pirouetted on his hind legs while a dozen hands fought for a hold on the bridle. They dragged at Jeffrey's legs; struck upward with clubs and pistol butts. He knew that he was hurt, and badly. But they must not pass.

Around again and back out of the midst of them he fought his way, still mounted. The rapier cut and thrust and heads bobbed and disappeared. As Jeffrey faced about in the center of the bridge a giant blow struck him in the chest. He heard the thud of a stone against the planking as he slipped from the saddle.

Jeffrey fell to his knees on the bridge. His hand was still under the basket hilt of the rapier, tight gripped there. He groped blindly with his other hand and touched the satin coat of Nick's leg. He pulled himself to his feet. The world was a swinging blur.

He drew a pistol and fired. Dropped it, and fired the other. Hold the bridge! Where were they? The sting of a fresh wound on his head answered him. His vision cleared. There they came! A solid mass of fighting men, to trample him down. Where was his cunning of brain and hand, his swift sureness of foot? He tried to mount and could not.

But his head was clear at last. He stepped forward unsteadily. The blade sang in his hand. That was better. Meet them with the point! He lunged

and a man went down, but his own legs almost crumpled under him as he recovered. Damn the scum! They backed off from cold steel!

Only for an instant. There were a good two score on their feet, pressing on, not to be denied. Jeffrey's back was against Nick's strong shoulder and with that help he thrust, parried blows from shovel handles and pitchforks, lunged desperately again and again. Suddenly the men broke around him like a wave, and pulled him down. Good-by, Janice!

A yell from many throats smote the night. Was that the voice of Malachi, rising above all the others? The bridge shook to rushing feet. The press grew thicker, but there were no more blows at Jeffrey's battered head. He sank lower toward the dust. The rapier was too heavy for his sword arm now. The din of the fight passed away from him.

TO the light of many candles Jeffrey opened his eyes. He lay wondering, while the murmur of low voices filled his ears. Suddenly he remembered, and tried to sit up.

"My sword!" That faint sound could not be his own voice. "Nick!"

"It would be better, sir, if you were to call for me!" Janice was leaning over him, speaking through sobs and happy laughter. He found himself in a great feather-bed, with Malachi beaming over the footboard and Darius Sterling standing beside one of the tall posts, supporting himself there.

"Janice!" He tried to smile, but the bandages hindered him. "Why should I call for Janice when she's with me now and forever!"

"Aye!" boomed Sterling, with a strange sound in his throat.

"Did we hold the bridge?" asked Jeffrey.

"You held the bridge," said Janice, softly, "and saved the forge. Then Malachi brought the night shift—they had no orders against him—and saved you."

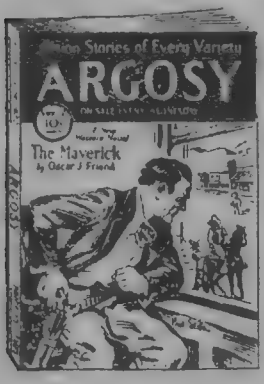
"You'll get nothing to eat but corn bread," said Jeffrey, light-headed still. "It's all I have."

"I'll eat that with you," whispered Janice, "or nothing at all. Forever and ever!"

"You've a fortune under your lake farm, my son," said Sterling, easing himself down to the bed. "I did not tell you to-day. And I'm willing to buy mineral rights alone and leave you the land."

"Sir," said Jeffrey, "I give the rights to Janice. I have no use for money. Janice is my fortune!"

THE END.



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Author of "Jungle Justice," "The Lost Punch," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

INTO the harbor of the home town of the famous criminal lawyer, Gillian Hazeltine, sails the black schooner Jula Jungle, with her crew of five men locked in the after cabin and guarded by Carolina Dawn and her fiancé Roger Pawling. Carolina's father Caleb, skipper and part owner, and the first mate, Dirk Morton, were killed with an ax, in their bunks in the after cabin; and Pawling is accused by all five of the survivors—Hans Larssen, the shrewd second mate; Pete Wallaby, the whining cockney steward; Ben Carney, the big black buck cook; and deck hands Lester Slick and Pierre Lohac. And Carolina had seen all five, a few instants after the murder, without a speck of blood on any of them.

Gillian agrees to defend Pawling, and learns that his lifelong opponent, District Attorney Adelbert Yistle, is going to substitute in Admiralty court for the Federal prosecutor, who is ill. Pawling had quarreled with both Captain Dawn and Dirk Morton, who disapproved of his love for Carolina.

Few and unhelpful are the clews found by Gillian. The head of Dirk Morton had been thrown overboard along with the ax, by the murderer.

This story began in the Argosy for November 29.

The killings took place during a calm, when Larssen might have left the wheel. A yellow slicker and gloves, salt-caked, are found under Ben Carney's bunk. And all the crew are tattooed with a square dot inside two circles, which proves to have been the emblem of a pirate ancestor of Larssen's.

A very snobbish Boston lawyer, Chauncey Haughton, comes to take charge of the defense, more to protect the Pawling relatives from Hazeltine's "sensationalism," such as his hint that a ghost did the murders, than to save Roger, whom Haughton considers guilty.

CHAPTER X.

AN AMAZING COURT ROOM.

CAROLINA DAWN sat in the front row which was reserved for witnesses and visiting attorneys. From where she sat she commanded an excellent view of the backs of the heads of the three men most vitally concerned with her interests: Gillian, Roger, and Mr. Haughton.

"The daughter of the seven seas," as the press of the nation referred to her, had never been in a court room before, and she was excited and depressed even by the preliminary processes of the legal machine.

To the right and left of her sat the witnesses; at one end, the five sailors; at the other the Bostonians.

Carolina gazed at them with ill-concealed displeasure. They had disdained, since their arrival in the town, to acknowledge her existence. To them she was nothing but a flaw in the family honor. That a Pawling should condescend to become engaged to such trash of the sea as Carolina Dawn!

But beyond her dislike for them and their haughtiness was the firm belief that they would be of small use to Roger's cause. Roger must come out of this clean and whole. There must not be the slightest shadow of a doubt upon his innocence.

It had amused Carolina to see these haughty Back Bay Bostonians when reporters and news photographers and movie cameramen were around. How they loved the limelight! How willingly they partook of this "disgusting publicity!"

Carolina hoped that Gillian would bring the trial to a smashing end before their time came to testify to Roger's "character," these snobs who had regarded the lively, energetic Roger Pawling as a "black sheep."

She continued her inspection of the court room. To her, this shabby, dusty place was a battlefield upon which the forces of Justice and the forces of Wrong would presently march and come to grips. Lies, truth and legal genius would be the weapons employed. And upon the outcome of the battle hinged her life's happiness. An indomitable spirit would not let her admit that defeat was a possibility.

Roger's golden head was being held high. Once he turned and looked at her; smiled. Her heart fluttered as it always did when he smiled at her.

She studied Gillian as he sat, relaxed, beside Roger. His face was now in profile. He was talking to Mr. Haughton. Now and then Gillian pushed up from his forehead a lock of black hair that was always falling down into his eyes.

Her eyes narrowed as she looked at the lawyer from Boston. She had seen him but once since that memorable meeting, weeks ago, in Gillian's office, and his manner had been even more

insulting than on their first meeting. And she had told him that he was nothing but a monkey wrench in the machine Gillian was building to free Roger! How she hated the man!

From him she looked at the two judges. They were severe-looking old men, and there was something ominous about the black robes they wore. They looked as if they were predisposed to think that any man brought before them was guilty. Gillian had told her that they were fair and just men, but harsh.

One was Circuit Judge Barlow; the other District Judge Marsh. In a lull, she heard their voices. She caught phrases: "I did that eleventh hole in par." Golf! While a man's life was at stake!

From the judges, she looked at the jury. Twelve good men and true, so some one had said. Good men? True? They looked very dumb to Carolina. They were the result of five days of hot quarreling among Gillian, Mr. Yistle, and Mr. Haughton. Landsmen all, she felt uneasy about them. The foreman was smirking at her now. He was a beefy man with piggy eyes and a thick sensuous mouth; a weak chin. He was trying to flirt—ogling her.

IT flashed over Carolina that no one in the court room but Gillian was seriously thinking of Roger. She amended that when her roving eyes lighted on Mr. Adelbert Yistle. His mop of iron-gray hair was rumpled. His face was flushed and moist. His eyes were flashing. There was nothing flippant or irrelevant about Mr. Yistle. He was all fight—a gladiator prepared for the fray!

Even as she watched him, a bailiff banged for order. Every one stopped talking, and Mr. Yistle began.

"... Necessary to inform you gentlemen that a murder case tried before a United States court is entirely different from a murder case tried before a State court. In this court, gentlemen, there are no degrees of murder. The defendant, if found guilty, is not guilty of first or second degree homicide, or of first or second degree manslaughter. He is guilty of murder. If he is found guilty, he is hanged. If he is not found guilty, he is freed. There are no halfway measures in a Federal court.

"As the representative of the United States district attorney, who is too ill to conduct this prosecution, it is my duty to prove to you beyond a reasonable doubt that that man who is seated over there, that man known as Roger Pawling, is guilty of the deliberate, horrible murders of Captain Caleb Dawn and First Officer Dirk Morton."

Mr. Yistle now went on to define to the jury just what was meant, legally, by the phrase, "a reasonable doubt." His bearing was majestic. His eloquence was fiery. His attitude, as he talked, became that of an inspired avenger.

"I consider it my sacred duty, gentlemen of the jury, to prove to you beyond a reasonable doubt that Roger Pawling did deliberately enter the cabin of Captain Dawn and murder him by severing his head with an ax; that he then entered the cabin of Dirk Morton, and in the same brutal and fiendish manner did bring his life to an abrupt end.

"Before I present witnesses, I wish to introduce as Exhibit A for the United States this drawing of the deck plan of the Jula Jungle, and as Exhibits B, C, and D these detailed drawings of the after house, the saloon, and the rooms occupied by the officers, the

passenger, and Miss Dawn. Has the defense objection?"

"The defense has," Gillian said.

Mr. Yistle glared at him. Mr. Haughton stared at his "assistant" with icy inquiry.

Judge Barlow said: "Mr. Hazeltine, I thought you had approved of these various sketches in a conference with Mr. Yistle yesterday."

"Your honor," Gillian grimly replied, "certain information has just come to me that has caused me to change my mind on using sketches and photographs. I respectfully petition that this trial take place on board the Jula Jungle."

"I emphatically object," Mr. Yistle barked.

Gillian addressed at him a steely-blue glance, and quickly shifted his eyes to the two judges.

"If the court please," he said in a voice that seemed to ring, "moving the trial to the schooner would obviate the use of sketches and photographs, and it would eliminate frequent visits by attorneys, jurymen and judges to the schooner. This trial threatens to be a long-drawn-out affair. The United States has upwards of twelve witnesses. The defense will produce more than twenty witnesses. The mass of testimony from this formidable array of witnesses will be materially reduced if testimony is taken at the scene of the murders."

MR. YISTLE burst out: "Your honor, I will admit that adjournment to the schooner would make the task of news-reel cameramen and news photographers easier. May I suggest to your honor that if Mr. Hazeltine's suggestion were followed, there would be great difficulty in controlling the great boatloads of spectators who would hover about. In case of rain, where would we be?"

"In the very spacious dining saloon," Gillian promptly answered.

There was great finality in Mr. Yistle's headshake.

"I submit," he claimed, "that such action would be absolutely without precedent."

"I submit," Gillian came back, "that whereas we are submitting evidence on a nautical scene to a jury of landsmen, it would greatly simplify matters if the scene were constantly before their eyes. Lengthy explanations of nautical terms would be eliminated. I submit that this court's calendar is crowded, and that my suggestion, if followed, would greatly reduce the time required for this case."

Judge Barlow beckoned Gillian and Mr. Yistle to the bench. The two attorneys joined with the two justices in a spirited discussion. With Gillian supplying the pros and Mr. Yistle the cons, the argument waxed warm. The court room grew restless. A bailiff banged for order.

Judge Barlow at length said: "Mr. Hazeltine's suggestion to adjourn court to the Jula Jungle is, while without precedent, a practical and workable one. The court orders an adjournment. I regret that there will be no room aboard for spectators, but there will be space enough for the press representatives. Gentlemen of the jury, you are admonished to discuss this case with no one on your way to the Jula Jungle. Court is adjourned."

Mr. Yistle irritably gathered up his papers. Mr. Haughton was also displeased. He said to Gillian with his usual frankness:

"You are displaying the cheap showmanship for which you are so no-

torious. You have something up your sleeve."

"Yes," Gillian agreed. "It's been up there since the day that old hulk came into the river. It became an amazing suspicion only a few minutes ago, but it is too preposterous to discuss."

Mr. Haughton looked skeptical. He still clung, after all this time, to the belief that Roger Pawling was the murderer, and nothing Gillian had said had shaken him. He said now, with biting irony:

"I suppose that, at the scene of the murders, you will be able to pin the guilt on the *real* murderer more easily than you could in this court room."

"You've guessed it," Gillian said.

He joined the exodus of jurymen, judges, witnesses, bailiffs, stenographers and newspaper men to taxicabs. Gillian, Roger, a bailiff, Mr. Haughton, and Carolina rode in one cab.

At the water front, a police launch was used to transfer the crowd to the deck of the schooner. Reporters perched on the roof of the after house. Benches were procured for judges and jury; more benches for witnesses.

There was no wind, but the sky was overcast. Rain might begin to fall at any moment.

Mr. Yistle, shuffling irritably through a portfolio of papers, snapped: "My first witness will be Miss Carolina Dawn."

CHAPTER XI.

"OUR ONLY CHANCE—"

A CHAIR on a box beside the steering wheel was the witness stand. The daughter of Caleb Dawn, looking very slim and small and young, walked to the chair and raised her right hand. A clerk with a Bible heard her oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Turning to the jury, Mr. Yistle said: "Gentlemen, before we can proceed to the taking of material testimony, it is first necessary to prove to the satisfaction of the law that the two men named in the indictment as the victims of Roger Pawling's horrible act are actully dead. I have asked Miss Dawn to take the stand solely to establish the fact.

"Miss Dawn, shortly after two o'clock on the morning of April 12th, did you, as the result of a certain confusion and outcry, leave your stateroom downstairs—in the after house—and make the discovery that your father and Dirk Morton, the chief mate, had summarily met their death?"

"I did," the girl answered in a low voice.

"You knew both men in life well enough so that your inspection of their dead bodies left no doubt in your mind that Captain Caleb Dawn and First Mate Dirk Morton had been murdered, presumably in their sleep?"

"I did."

"That will be all. Does the defense wish to take this witness?"

"No," said Gillian.

"You are excused, Miss Dawn. My next witness will be Ben Carney."

At this juncture a tug chugged by, with a movie photographer on the deck rapidly turning the handle of his camera. Mr. Yistle snorted. Mr. Haughton sniffed. So, audibly, did several of Mr. Haughton's Boston witnesses.

The Negro cook slouched to the stand. He automatically raised his hand and was sworn.

Flatfootedly, Mr. Yistle faced him. "Mr. Carney, on the morning of April 12th, were you called upon to perform

a very painful but necessary duty in committing the remains of Captain Caleb Dawn and of Dirk Morton to the sea?"

The Negro rolled his eyes and grinned for a flash.

"Yassuh. Sho' was dis'greeable and painful."

"Kindly tell the jury just what you did."

"Ah sewed up de cap'm and de mate in sailcloth lak Misto' Lahssen done tol' me, suh. Dassall. I sewed up each gemman separate, with iron bars 'round 'em, so's the sharks wouldn't bite through the sailcloth and eat 'em. Yassuh."

"Now, Mr. Carney, in performing this very painful but necessary duty, did you chance to examine the torsos of the two dead men?"

"The whassos, suh?"

"The bodies from the waist up. Specifically, the necks. Did you examine the necks, or the stubs of necks, of the two dead men?"

"Sho' did, suh."

"What conclusion did you draw as to how those two unfortunate men had met their death? Tell the jury."

The big black man looked owlishly at the jury.

"Yassuh," he said amiably, and rolled his eyes. "De perclusion Ah drawed was dat de cap'm and de mate had had dey heads lopped off neat wid an ax. Yassuh. One wallop—and off came de cap'm's head. One wallop and off came de mate's head. Lak dat—*wham! wham!*"

"They must have been terrific blows," suggested Mr. Yistle.

"You tell 'em, boss. *Wham! Wham!* Dassall! Goo'-by, friends—hello, hebben!"

Mr. Yistle turned to Gillian. "I will recall this witness later, to support and confirm certain material testimony. Do you wish to cross-examine him now, or will you wait?"

Gillian waved his hand in dismissal.

HANS LARSSEN was Mr. Yistle's next witness. The big blue-eyed blond who had been the acting master of this ship until Carolina Dawn's "mutiny," went to the chair. He was calm, composed. His eyes on the jury were mild and trustful.

Larssen testified that, as acting master, he had performed burial services over the two bodies and consigned them to the sea.

Having legally established that the two dead men were dead and now at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, Larssen was excused subject to recall, and Mr. Yistle began his real attack.

He said to the jury: "Because the events of that tragic night were observed by the witnesses I shall produce, I will have the story of the death of Captain Dawn and Dirk Morton told to you from the witness stand in proper time order from beginning to end. First, we will hear from Mr. Peter Wallaby."

Peter Wallaby crossed the deck to the chair. He sniffled as he sat down. He looked dolefully at the jury. He sniffled again. He looked as if he might burst into tears. The tip of his sharp little nose was red. It seemed to twitch.

Mr. Yistle began to fire questions at him.

"Are you the steward of this boat?"

"Yes, sir; I ham, sir."

"Are you personally acquainted with that young man sitting over there on that bench?"

"Yes, sir; that is Mr. Roger Pawling."

"In the course of your duties as steward, was it necessary for you to go in and out of the dining saloon frequently?"

"Yes, sir."

"On these visits did you ever hear Captain Dawn and Mr. Pawling arguing or quarreling?"

"Yes, sir; often, sir. After the first week out, it seemed like the captain and Mr. Pawling were quarreling hall the time, sir."

"What were they quarreling about?"

"They were quarreling about Captain Dawn's daughter—the young lydy a settin' over there, sir. It seems as 'ow Mr. Pawling 'ad took quite a fawncy to the young lydy, sir. And the captain, 'e objected most strenuous, sir. And on the night before the captain was murdered by this young man—"

"Objection!" Gillian snapped.

"Sustained," ruled Judge Barlow.

Mr. Yistle: "It has not yet been proved, Mr. Wallaby, that Mr. Pawling committed the murders. You must not presume that."

The cockney sniffled and smiled. His vampire teeth flashed and became invisible.

"I get you, sir. On the night before the captain was murdered, the two of them almost came to blows, sir. The young man, Mr. Pawling, 'e says to the captain, 'Captain,' 'e says, 'if you think Carolina and I aren't goin' to get married,' 'e says, 'you're a crazy old fool. If necess'ry,' 'e says, 'I will kill any man wot stands between me and 'er.'"

Carolina's nails were biting into her palms. She sent a wan look at Gillian, but he only smiled. His smile said, "The lying has only begun."

Mr. Yistle was briskly and capably leading his witness to tell of other quarrels Roger had had with the captain, and of quarrels he had had with the mate.

ON numerous occasions, Wallaby testified, Roger had threatened to "get" each of the two men.

"'E and the myte, Mr. Morton, came to blows, sir, the night before the myte was killed. The myte, 'e knocked Mr. Pawling unconscious, sir; and when Mr. Pawling came to, the myte, 'e says, 'If I catch you 'angin' around that innocent girl again,' 'e says, 'I will knock your teeth down your dirty throat.'"

"And what did Mr. Pawling say to that?"

"'E says, 'Oh, you will, will you?' 'e says. 'Well,' 'e says, 'two can play at that gyme. You may not live,' 'e says, 'to knock my teeth down my throat.'"

Mr. Yistle began to review Wallaby's testimony. He refreshed the witness's memory, and Wallaby, sniffling, recalled further quarrels, and further threats the prisoner had made on the lives of the two men.

When the fact had been firmly established that Roger Pawling had done practically nothing on board the Jula Jungle except to quarrel with the captain and mate and threaten their lives, Mr. Yistle said politely: "I am through with this witness."

Gillian did not move from his bench. He said:

"Do you intend to recall this witness, too?"

"I do," said Mr. Yistle. "Do you waive cross-examination?"

"Not entirely," Gillian answered with a grim smile. "I want to ask Wallaby one or two questions. They concern Mr. Wallaby's past. Mr.

Wallaby, I want you to think this question over, weigh it carefully—and answer it truthfully. Were you ever arrested and tried for murder?"

Mr. Yistle loudly objected, declaring that the question was irrelevant.

"I am merely," Gillian explained, "endeavoring to impeach the credibility of this witness."

Judge Barlow said: "The objection is overruled. Proceed."

"Answer the question," Gillian said to the witness.

"Well, wot if I was?" snarled the cockney. "We all myke mistykes, don't we? I myde mine in Sydney, Australia. I was young. I was took in by a crowd of roughs. I was drinkin' and gamblin'. I can explain everything! You listen!" The cockney's voice was going higher and higher. He was making wild gestures with his hands, fluttering his fingers in great arcs, flashing his little vampire teeth. "I killed that blighter in self-defense!"

"Don't lie to me! You stabbed Dan Parker, a British seaman, in the back after a fight in a pub on the night of January ninth, nineteen hundred and twelve. Wasn't there a fight in that pub?"

"There was. Everybody was fightin'—"

"Didn't you follow Dan Parker down an alley afterward and stab him in the back? Didn't you get twenty years for it? And wasn't the case reopened in a higher court and the verdict reversed because of a technical error? Isn't that how you got your freedom after you had deliberately and with premeditation murdered that seaman?"

The cockney was beating on his knees with his fluttering hands.

Mr. Yistle harshly objected. He said that Gillian was bulldozing his witness.

"I am merely proving that this man's testimony in any court of law is not fit for intelligent men to hear!" Gillian hotly countered.

"Well, what of it?" Mr. Yistle shouted. "You have established in the minds of the jury that the witness made an early mistake. Your honor, I object to this testimony."

"Overruled!"

"Exception!"

"Exception is noted. Mr. Hazeltine, have you finished with this witness?"

"If the court please, I have endeavored to prove that this man's testimony is worthless in any court of law. I submit that his testimony under direct examination be stricken from the record."

"Denied!"

Mr. Yistle grinned savagely at Gillian. He might as well have cried, like a triumphant duelist, *"Touché!"*

"IT will be my plan," Gillian addressed the court, "to prove, one at a time, that the five material witnesses are unfit to testify in this or any other court. Each of these men has a criminal record and—"

"Objection!" Mr. Yistle cried. "It is summation."

"Sustained," ruled the court. "Save such remarks for your summing up, Mr. Hazeltine. Are you through with this witness?"

"No, your honor." Gillian turned back to Wallaby:

"Wallaby, do you own a quarter interest in this boat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does Larssen own another quarter interest?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you and Larssen ever quarrel with Captain Dawn as to what kind of trading she was to engage in?"

"Oh, no, sir. We just had friendly talks. That's all. We never quarreled."

"If Captain Dawn were out of your way, you and Larssen could do what you wished with the schooner, could you not?"

"Objection!" Mr. Yistle snapped. "The question is inferential."

"Overruled. The witness will answer."

Wallaby looked scared. He said: "What was the question?"

"I'll put it another way," Gillian said. "You and Larssen would have profited by murdering the captain, wouldn't you?"

"No, sir!" Wallaby shrilled. "Indeed not!"

"But didn't he oppose your plan of taking this schooner to the Gulf of Mexico and putting her in the copra trade, or the booze-running or dope-running racket?"

"We weren't goin' to run booze or dope!" the witness shrilled. "We were goin' to carry copra."

"But the captain opposed you!"

"The captain, 'e 'ated the tropics."

"Answer my question yes or no. Didn't the captain oppose your plan of taking this boat south?"

"Yes!"

"Then, if you had killed him, you could have taken the boat south."

"We didn't kill him!"

"Wallaby, who cut the lifeboat away from these after davits?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Who took the door off Mr. Pawling's room and threw it overside?"

"Mr. Pawling did, sir, while Miss Dawn guarded us with a gun."

"This witness is excused for recall," Gillian said.

Mr. Haughton was frowning. He was impatient for the United States to finish presenting its case, so that he could produce the cream of Boston's aristocracy. He said reprovingly to Gillian:

"You are being too antagonistic."

"I haven't even begun," Gillian growled. "Our only chance so far is to plant in the jury's mind the fact that each of these witnesses has a criminal record and that at least two of them would have had something to gain by the captain's death. That's my campaign."

Mr. Haughton sniffed. Mr. Yistle barked:

"Ben Carney—recall!"

CHAPTER XII.

GORY TESTIMONY.

THE large and powerful black man returned to the witness stand with his wide, clownish grin.

Mr. Yistle: "Mr. Carney, did you keep an ax in the galley of this ship?"

"Yassuh."

"What was its purpose?"

"It come in handy when Ah needed to split firewood fo' de galley stove, suh. Cain't split firewood widout an ax, boss."

"At any time did you observe that the accused—Mr. Pawling—was peculiarly interested in this ax?"

"Ah sho' did, boss. He sho' was int'rested in dat ol' ax. He used to come back to de galley an' heft it. He used to take it out and split up wood fo' exercise. Ah didn't hab no quarrel wid him about splittin' mah wood. But what got me wonderin' was when he whetted it up. Yassuh. He sho' did whet up dat ole ax."

"You mean, he sharpened it?"

"Dassit! He sho' did sharpen up dat ol' ax. He whetted it an' he

whetted it till dat ol' ax was jes' lak a razor. Sho' could split a hair on it when he got through whettin'. Never did see such a fine cuttin' edge on an ax in mah bawn days."

"Well, what was his purpose in sharpening the ax? Tell the jury about that."

"Reckon Ah cain't explain it, suh. Whuffo' does any man want an ax so sharp? Mebby he was fixin' to chop off somebody's haid."

"Objection!" Gillian barked.

"Sustained. Strike out that answer." Judge Barlow bent a severe gaze on the Negro. "You must answer questions directly and without inference or supposition."

The Negro looked puzzled. He said, "Yes, jedge. Sho'. But whuffo' did he sharpen up dat ol' ax dataway? It was lak dis, jedge. When a man splits wood, he wants a dull ax. When he chops wood, he wants a sharp ax. We wasn't choppin' wood, we was splittin' wood. It was already cut to length fo' de galley stove. Whuffo' did he whet up dat ol' ax jes' to split wood? Da's whut Ah wanna know."

"I see," said the judge.

Gillian could not pounce on that testimony, and it was dangerous testimony. He knew that the Negro was lying about the ax, but Carney testified so convincingly that the jury would believe him.

Mr. Yistle asked: "When did this happen? When did Mr. Pawling put such a sharp edge on that ax?"

"De mawnin' ob de day the cap'm and mate was kilt."

The reporters perched on the deck of the after house murmured. A bailiff glared at them.

Mr. Yistle: "Ben, did you ask Mr. Pawling why he was sharpening that ax?"

"Yassuh. I says to him, 'White boy,' I says, 'whuffo' you whettin' up dat ol' ax so sharp?' And he says, 'Mebbe Ah's gwine kill somebuddy, nigga.' Dat's whut he says."

Mr. Yistle bowed to Gillian, and his eyes were sparkling.

"BEN," Gillian began his cross-examination, "were you ever convicted on a criminal charge?"

The Negro rolled his eyes. He lifted his big shoulders.

"Boss man, Ah disrecollect."

"Perhaps I can refresh your memory. On the evening of December twenty-fifth—Christmas night—in 1920, did you not attack a washwoman in Daytona, Florida, with a razor, and slash her face and neck so that it was necessary for her to spend two months in a hospital?"

"Ah don' seem to remember."

"I see. You've attacked so many women with a razor that you don't recollect that particular incident. After all, a man who goes around slashing people with razors as you've done wouldn't recall a single little instance like that one. Isn't that the size of it?"

"Listen heah, white man—" the witness indignantly began.

"Objection!" snapped Mr. Yistle.

"Sustained. Reframe your question, Mr. Hazeltine."

"Yes, your honor. Carney, you served seven years for slashing that woman with your razor, didn't you?"

"No, suh! Ah sutny did not! Ah only served fo' yeahs."

"Then you admit slashing that poor, crippled old lady with your razor?"

"She wasn't a po' crippled old lady! She was a pow'ful young wench. We had wu'ds. Dat black gal, she rode me ragged, she did."

"So you slashed her with your

razor. You're quite an expert on sharp-edged tools, aren't you, Carney?"

"Ah knows a cuttin' edge when Ah sees one."

"Your honor," Gillian said, "I submit that this man's testimony under direct examination lacks credibility because of his criminal record. If the court please, it should be stricken from the record."

This request was purely technical. Gillian knew that his wish would be denied. He merely wanted to keep in the forefront of the jury's minds that a witness with a criminal record was unreliable.

"Will this witness be recalled?"

"He will," snapped Mr. Yistle. "Next witness—Lester Slick!"

THE gorilla man took the stand and testified that he was a deck hand and was personally acquainted with Roger Pawling.

Mr. Yistle: "Mr. Slick, kindly describe to the jury your actions and observations in regard to the accused on the morning of April twelfth at or before two o'clock."

"Well, sir, it was a hot night—so hot that a man couldn't get a wink of sleep in the fo'c's'le. So Pierre Lohac and I drug out our mattresses and laid 'em on the stabbard side o' the deck just for'ard o' the galley, where we could get what breeze was blowin'.

"The Frenchman and I was layin' there, tryin' to get to sleep. The second mate, Mr. Larssen, was at the wheel. He had just struck four bells—two o'clock, that is, in land time—when I see this young feller, this Roger Pawling, come sneakin' along the deck like he didn't want nobody to see him.

"I was lyin' on my back, looking up at the stars beyond the riggin', when I heard the scuff of his foot on the top stair, or the wave check at the top of the stairway leadin' for'ard out o' the after house. When I looked, there he was, dim-like in the light o' the stars. He was actin' so sneaky that I sat right up and looked. But he didn't see me, or if he did, he didn't pay no attention. He snuck into the galley, and when he come out he had the cook's ax in his two hands, holdin' it to his chest like this."

Mr. Slick demonstrated how the accused had held the ax.

"He walked back down the deck to the after stairway again, and I give Frenchy a nudge in the ribs. I says, 'Frenchy,' I says, 'there's some dirty work goin' on here. Wake up. Roger just borried the cook's ax and took it down into the after house.'

"So Frenchy and I, we circled the after house on the port side and we find Ben Carney standin' beside the wheel talkin' to Mr. Larssen.

"I told Mr. Larssen what I had just saw. And the words was hardly out of my mouth when it happened!"

"What happened?" Mr. Yistle barked in the breathless silence. A fine drizzle was falling, but no one gave heed to it.

"I'll have to explain," the witness answered. "Mr. Larssen was standin' there, with one hand on a spoke o' the wheel. Ben was standin' right there with his back to the rail, and Frenchy and I were standing right there.

"From where the four of us was standin', we could see through those portholes there into the cabins."

"Wait a minute," Mr. Yistle stopped him. "Do you mean there were lights in those cabins?"

"I'm gettin' to that," the gorilla man answered. "That porthole there is the porthole of the captain's room. And that one in the middle there is the

porthole of Mr. Pawling's room. And that one, over on the port side, is the porthole of the first mate's room."

Mr. Yistle said sharply: "What did you see in those portholes?"

The gorilla slowly shook his head. "It was terrible, it was. While the four of us was watchin', we saw Mr. Pawling come into the skipper's room with a candle in his left hand and the ax in his right. We wondered what he was up to. Not one of us had the idee that he was up to anything like cold-blooded murder. We just stood and watched, curious-like.

"Mr. Pawling, he set the candle down on that little table under the porthole, then he grabbed the ax in both hands, lifted it up and swung it down with a terrible swing. Up come the ax—and down come the ax! Like that!

"We heard the thump of it, then a gurglin' sound, and a sort of splashin' sound. I figgered that when a man gets his head lopped off like that, clean, the blood squirts out of the neck arteries in a solid stream. It must have been that stream strikin' the bulkhead that I heard."

"NEVER mind what you thought. What did you do?"

"Do?" Mr. Slick repeated. "We was just struck dumb. It was just like seein' a terrible dream, it was. We just couldn't believe such a thing—goin' in like that and loppin' off a man's head while he was asleep. What would you 'a' done?"

"Answer my question. What did you do?"

"I told you—we was froze stiff! We watched Mr. Pawling pick up the candle—"

"Was his hand steady?"

"I don't remember. He picked the candle up—"

"Wait a minute. Let's go back a little. Did you see the ax strike the captain?"

"I don't like to think about it," the witness answered. "Yes, sir. I saw it all. The old man was lyin' face down on his bunk. It was built as a double-decker, but he had the upper bunk took out. On account o' the heat, he didn't have a stitch of anything on him. He was layin' there plumb naked. I saw Mr. Pawling lift up the ax and bring it down smack on the old man's neck. His head come off just as neat and clean—"

"That will do."

Roger had risen from the bench on which he sat beside Gillian. He was pale and his lips were working convulsively. Gillian quickly grasped his arm and pulled him back. "Never mind," he said.

"But don't you see," the young man whispered huskily, "he's making it sound so damned convincing! I'd almost believe it myself! They're building up an absolutely watertight case! No wonder he can describe it in such detail! If Larssen didn't do it, he did!"

The witness was saying: ". . . Just froze stiff, we was. And before we could snap out of it, we saw him take that candle up and move on past his room into Dirk Morton's room. Dirk was layin' on his bunk like the skipper had been, without a stitch on, only he was lyin' face up, with his head facin' the door. His mouth was open and he was snorin'.

"Mr. Pawling come in, put the candle down on the edge of the wash-basin, and took two hands to the ax again. We began yelling at him. He looked up, holdin' the ax, but he couldn't see nothin' because the light was on his side o' the porthole. Up come the ax—and down come the ax!

And off come Dirk Morton's red head!"

THE witness paused again. Every one on the after deck, including the two judges, was staring at him with horror. Even Gillian was, for the moment, spellbound by the picture he had drawn. It was vivid and real and it sounded like truth. He was realizing what a tremendous task lay ahead of him, in persuading the jury to disregard the testimony of these men. How carefully they had rehearsed these lies! How beautifully Mr. Yistle had trained them!

Mr. Yistle said: "You saw Mr. Pawling, the accused, strike off Dirk Morton's head with the ax, after he had struck off Captain Dawn's head with the ax. The light afforded by the candle was sufficient in both cases for you to identify the man with the ax as Mr. Pawling, and his victims, respectively, as Captain Dawn and Dirk Morton?"

"Yes, sir. We could see it plain."

"You say he struck each man a single blow?"

"Yes, sir. He had been practicin' on that wood pile and his aim was mighty good."

"Tell the jury what happened after you saw Mr. Pawling strike off Dirk Morton's head."

"Things was pretty confusin', they happened so fast. The first thing, as I rec'lect, was that Mr. Pawling picked up the candle and started out of the mate's room. I remember Mr. Larssen yellin', 'Come on, you guys! We gotta grab that feller! He'll be killin' us next!'

"Well, we hesitated about goin' down into that cabin. Mebbe you can understand why. It was dark down there by then, and nobody wanted their head to come off the way the captain's and Dirk's had come off. We went to the head of the stairs and waited there a minute.

"We heard the sounds of the ax smashin' down below. Later on, we figgered he had gone all around the big room smashin' things. He smashed in a panel on Miss Dawn's door, and he smashed in a panel on his own door. I guess he smashed up a few chairs, too, but I ain't sure."

The witness paused and bared his tobacco-stained fangs. Mr. Yistle continued his examination:

"Let's go back into Dirk's room a moment. Mr. Slick, after you saw Mr. Pawling chop off Dirk Morton's head, did you notice him do anything strange?"

"Well, it was all pretty strange, Mr. Yistle. Just what do you mean, for instance? I don't quite understand what you mean."

"I mean, did you see him do anything strange in connection with Dirk Morton's head?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, sir, that's right. It sure was strange, all right. After he had chopped off his head, he stood and watched the blood squirting out of the mate's neck and the body flopping around the way a chicken's does when you cut off its head.

"Then he stooped over that bloody mess and picked up the head by a handful of red hair. He stood and looked at it a second, then he grinned. Then he went out with the head in one hand and the ax in the other. It was after that that we heard him smashin' things up."

Gillian wondered if the jury had swallowed that. Coming as an afterthought, it sounded unconvincing. But the jurymen were gazing raptly at the witness, with horror written on their

faces. They had evidently swallowed it word for word.

MR. YISTLE: "He didn't pick up the candle when he went out?"

"No, sir; he had his hands full as it was. But he knocked the candle over, or it fell over, I forget which. Anyway, there was no light at all. Just those sounds of smashing goin' on down there, and Mr. Larssen tellin' us to go down and grab him.

"All of a sudden, it got quiet again. I know now that Mr. Pawling was running up the for'ard stairway and to the rail and throwing Mr. Morton's head overboard with the ax. He came back down the stairs, and when he got down, we got there just about a second later. We all struck matches, and we grabbed him."

In the tense silence Mr. Yistle walked ponderously over to the witness. He placed the palm of his left hand under the elbow of his right arm. Slowly he shook his right index finger in the gorilla's face.

"How about the captain's daughter? Where was she? What was she doing?"

"When we got down into the cabin, she was in Mr. Pawling's arms. She had fainted. She was comin' to as we crowded around. First thing she says was, 'Oh, Roger, why did you kill them?'"

"There must have been blood on her from his hands."

"Yes, sir; she was all smeared with blood from him. She kept yellin': 'Oh, Roger, why did you kill them?' Then she got hysterics. She laughed and cried and carried on somethin' awful."

"I want you to tell the jury about the blood you saw on Mr. Pawling and elsewhere."

"Well, sir, he was bloody all over. There was blood on his face and on his hands and wrists clear up beyond his elbows. His hands was solid blood. His pyjama sleeves was soppin' wet with it. It was terrible. The saloon and the skipper's and mate's cabins was like a slaughterhouse. Blood everywhere and on everything."

"When you seized Mr. Pawling, what did you do with him?"

"We put him in irons."

"Did he resist?"

"I'll tell the cock-eyed world he did! He socked Frenchy in the jaw and Pete Wallaby in the forehead and knocked them cuckoo. We carried him into the chain locker."

"Did he escape from there?"

"You might call it escapin'. Noon the next day, the five of us was settin' in the saloon eatin' lunch when Miss Dawn's door pops open and out she comes with a gun in her hand. She says to stick 'em up. She made Mr. Larssen hand over the keys to Pawling's handcuffs."

"That will be all for the present," Mr. Yistle said.

Gillian arose. The drizzle was increasing. He said:

"Mr. Slick, what was Mr. Pawling wearing that night?"

"A suit of pyjamas and a blue bathrobe."

"What became of them?"

"They must have been thrown overboard, sir."

Gillian pointed to the window farthest over on the port side.

"Is that the porthole at which you were standing when you saw Mr. Pawling chop off Dirk Morton's head?"

"Yes, sir; that's the one."

"You saw him place the candle on the washstand, then pick up the ax and chop off Mr. Morton's head?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you say he stood and watched the blood spurt out of the stump of the dying man's neck and observed the manner in which the body was jerking and twitching?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then you saw him stoop down and pick up Dirk Morton's head?"

"Yes, sir."

"From where you were standing, or crouching, what did that head look like? Try to describe it."

"I don't know if I can, sir. Mr. Morton had, as you know, bright red hair. Mr. Pawling just grabbed a handful of it and held up the head."

"Was the hair long?"

"Yes, sir. Dirk wore his hair pretty long."

"He wasn't inclined to be bald?"

"No, sir; he had real thick hair."

"Was his mouth open—I mean, when Mr. Pawling picked up the head and looked at it?"

"I think it was. And the eyes were open, too. I can remember seeing the light on them. It was terrible."

GILLIAN nodded. "Mr. Slick, I want you to tell the jury just what was your honest opinion of Dirk Morton. Please answer that question carefully. Take your time. Did you love him like a brother?"

"No, sir; I did not. He was a bully. No one liked him. He was mean to everybody on board. Captain Dawn was a-scared of him half the time. I don't think he realized what a bully Dirk was when he signed him on."

"Did Dirk ever beat you up?"

"There wasn't a man in the crew he didn't beat up sometime or other."

"It didn't break your heart when he was killed, did it?"

Mr. Yistle started to object. He was wearing a puzzled frown. He opened his mouth, reconsidered, and closed it.

The witness bared his yellowed fangs in a leer.

"I didn't bust down and bawl when I knew he was dead!"

Mr. Yistle interrupted: "Your honor, I can't see that this line of questioning is getting us anywhere. It strikes me as being entirely irrelevant."

But Judge Barlow would not sustain his objection. He told Gillian to continue. Gillian did so, but he took a new tack.

"Mr. Slick, was Mr. Wallaby on this deck with Mr. Larssen, Ben Carney, Pierre Lohac and you when the murders were committed?"

"No, sir."

"Was he in the cabin when you arrested Mr. Pawling?"

"He was. That is, he came down right after us."

"Where had he been?"

"I think in the fo'c's'le."

"How long have you been a deck hand in the crew of this schooner?"

"Four years and two months up to the time we anchored here."

"In those four years, Wallaby and Dirk Morton were also members of the crew, were they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"They had been sailing in this schooner before you joined the crew?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you ever see Dirk Morton beat up Wallaby?"

"Yes, sir; several times."

"Did it ever strike you that Wallaby was under the influence of Dirk Morton? I'll be more specific. Did it strike you that Dirk Morton ordered Wallaby around like a slave?"

"Yes, sir. I noticed that." The gorilla's eyes were narrow now, and glinting with suspicion.

Gillian proceeded more cautiously.

"Did you ever wonder about it?"

"I guess we all wondered about it."

"Didn't you have a conversation once with Mr. Pawling in which you stated that you thought Dirk Morton 'had something on' Wallaby? Meaning, a knowledge of some guilty incident in Wallaby's past?"

"I don't recall any such conversation," said the witness.

"Your memory," Gillian barked, "has been surprisingly fresh on other points. Try to recall that conversation."

"I don't remember it."

"VERY well. Let's go back a few years," Gillian suggested suavely. "Were you not arrested in Pensacola, Florida, on March 19, 1923, by Coast Guard officers with a gang of rum runners in connection with the murder of Coast Guard Lieutenant Andrew Leslie?"

The gorilla bared his fangs.

"Did I kill him?" he snapped.

"Were you not sentenced to a three-year term for perjury?"

"What if I was?"

"Your honor," Gillian said quickly, "I submit that this man is a perjurer; was convicted of a charge of perjury in a United States court; that his entire testimony is inadmissible."

Judge Barlow denied Gillian's request. The judge then said to the jury:

"Gentlemen, I presume that you are all aware of what Mr. Hazeltine is trying to do. He has every right to bring up the question of these men's criminal pasts, if they have such pasts. Such testimony as they have given in direct examination is admissible to the record. I am sure that Mr. Hazeltine will not object to my making it quite clear that he wishes you to consider the weight of their testimony as influenced by their criminal records. He has a perfect right to cast doubt on the credibility of every witness the United States offers. Do you wish to ask further questions of this witness, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"Yes, your honor." Gillian addressed Slick. "I want you to tell the jury just when you had that mark tattooed on your chest. Kindly open your shirt and show the jury that mark."

The gorilla unbuttoned his shirt.

Gillian: "When was that mark tattooed there?"

"I don't remember."

"Wasn't it done on the forenoon of the day Captain Dawn and Dirk Morton were buried at sea?"

"I don't remember."

"I'll try to refresh your memory," Gillian said grimly. "On the night of May 6, did you go to a night club with a girl named Clara Delaney?"

"Here, in this town?"

"Here, in this town."

"Well, what if I did?"

"In the course of the evening, don't you recall telling Miss Delaney that Ben Carney tattooed you, Pierre Lohac and Pete Wallaby, with a careful and artistic imitation of the mark on Hans Larssen's forearm?"

The gorilla bared his teeth. "So that tomato was one of your spies, eh?"

"I can produce her to corroborate what I am saying."

"Don't bother. Sure! We got tattooed that morning. We didn't have anything else to do. We were killin' time."

MR. YISTLE interrupted. He declared that all of these questions and answers were irrelevant. The two judges looked inquiringly at Gillian.

Gillian said to them: "I am endeavoring, a step at a time, to prove that a conspiracy exists to send the accused to the gallows; that these five men have plotted and planned to foist the guilt of the two murders on him. Each of the five men has this mark tattooed somewhere upon his body. That mark is prima facie evidence that such a conspiracy was and is in effect."

Judge Barlow said quickly. "Can you prove that now, Mr. Hazeltine?"

"My whole defense, your honor, is based on the fact that such a conspiracy exists and that each member of it, because of previous criminal records, is unfit to give testimony in any law court."

"Objection is overruled. You may proceed, Mr. Hazeltine."

"This witness is excused," Gillian said.

"My next witness," Mr. Yistle snapped, "is Hans Larssen."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

For the Sake of a Lady

HISTORY has it that nations have gone to war for the sake of a lady. This idea would be laughed at in these advanced times, but let me tell you about the Konkombas, who live in Togoland under British rule. These people are great fighters and they generally go to war about a girl. One village quarrels with the next, the least excuse being sufficient, and then, without any fuss or ceremony, the day of battle will be arranged and preparations made for a nice little scrap.

The fighting men of the rival villages assemble on the chosen ground and advance toward each other over the open grass lands in two long lines, armed with bows and arrows. Each man selects an antagonist, whom he stalks, making use of whatever cover the scrub affords until he is within range. Great care is taken to make sure that two sides are equal so that the fight will be man to man. When near enough each man shoots his arrow and immediately runs back to cover.

The fighting men are followed by a line of non-combatants, old men and women, who carry pots of water, native medicine, and crude instruments with which to bathe and clean the wounds. Every man is allotted an attendant. As soon as a man is hit he is at once allowed to leave the battlefield and make for his particular attendants to have his wounds cleaned, and the antidote applied. Occasionally a warrior will receive a nasty gash which is poisonous, and the attendants will not hesitate to cut out a sizable chunk of flesh round the wound.

The fight continues until one side or the other is tired, but no hand-to-hand mass fighting takes place. The warriors will return to their villages and arrange to "have it out" some other day. Strange to say these Konkombas look on their fights as a kind of national sport and no amount of government supervision will make them live in peace as long as there is a lady in the case.

Jack Blackburn.

The current caught the corporal's body

Swift Water

Corporal McLeod of the Mounted was on his way to take the man Brant back to prison—but the ruthless, mocking gods of the Northland had another plan

By JAY J. KALEZ

BRANT, the prisoner, tall and gaunt, stood with face soberly pressed against the rusted iron window bars of the single cell within the Post headquarters at Yellow Knife and watched the red sun-ball creep slowly up over the far-off white-ridged Caribous. He had dared all, and lost. Now, back to prison!

Outside the cell door his captor, Corporal McLeod, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, lay sprawled upon the crude bench eying his man. The moaning chant of the wooded North drifted in past the barred windows. The dawn-painted skies reflected their glow upon the barren log walls.

The door fronting the cell pushed open. A leather-coated figure stepped in. "The plane's ready, corporal," the newcomer announced. "We can take off whenever you say."

The corporal pulled himself to his feet. "We'll start right away," he spoke, reaching up and slipping a heavy key from a wall hook. "Come on, Brant! You'll see all that better from the air. Stick out the wrist!"

The prisoner turned from the window and crossed the cell. The corporal drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and, opening the cell door, snapped one cuff about the prisoner's wrist and the other about his own.

"Just so's you won't try any funny stuff when we get in the air," the corporal offered, as he tested the cuffs with a slight jerk. "C'mon!"

The cell door slammed shut. The corporal, stepping back across the room to the bench that had formed his bed for the night, picked a heavy, waterproof pack sack from off the floor and swung it to one shoulder. The prisoner, who had perforce accompanied him, eyed him wonderingly.

"Why take that?" he mumbled in question, a nod to the pack with its clumsy bulge and rifle barrel protruding above the cover-flap.

"This thing is over for you, Brant," the corporal answered, "but it's not over for a lot of other people. This pack may tell a lot when we get back to Westminister. Headquarters will want to know a bit about the way a convict escaping from prison can outfit himself with gun and pack, while every Mounty north of the Fraser is on the lookout for him. C'mon! We want to get going while the sky is clear."

THE pilot, his leather helmet already atop his head, nodded as the two men approached the plane. "What's the luggage?" he asked, as his eyes caught the pack sack with its protruding rifle barrel.

"Headquarters' orders," the corporal shouted above the engine's hum. "Brant't outfit. Going to try to trace it. Where'll I put it?"

The pilot snatched the clumsy pack off the corporal's shoulder and jammed it into the forward cockpit.

"Any time, corporal," he called, above the propeller's swirl. "Hop up and I'll strap you in."

Prisoner first, the two men climbed over the fuselage into the forward cockpit. The pilot followed them. A shouted warning, a slow revving up of the motor from its idle purr into a deafening roar, and with a sudden, gentle sway, the plane started down the field. Prisoner and captor gripped the cowling against the ship's bumping dance as, with a slow lift, the plane took to the air. Stiffly they watched the ground below them change to a gay patterned carpet as the pilot climbed and headed on his course.

An hour passed, while the wilderness swept beneath them. The prisoner sat in silence, his eyes holding to the far-off dip of the horizon ahead.

Suddenly his hand lifted and pointed. Far ahead a narrow ribbon of glazed blue seemed to peep up from between the crowded spread of green that held it. The corporal nodded as he caught the gesture. Half turning in the cockpit, he signaled the pilot and pointed ahead.

"The Fraser," his lips formed, the words whipped from his mouth in the propeller's wash.

The pilot's eyes followed, and the ship swung ever so slightly to aim its nose toward the ribbon of glazed blue. The Fraser River was to guide them through the confusion of barren rock peaks that loomed beyond as a barrier. The ship straightened on its course.

Another half hour passed. They rode now as on a sea of nothingness. Suddenly the two men in the forward cockpit stiffened. Above their heads a shadow had crossed, screamed a cry, audible even in the propeller's roar, and then passed on.

They stared up. The lips of the prisoner rolled into a smile. The face of the corporal grew grave. Behind them the pilot frowned as he dipped his wings. For above them, a great bald eagle was paralleling their speed with effortless ease, sounding challenging shrieks for that unknown winged monster that dared intrude his domain.

Then it happened.

The hovering challenger above

seemed to fold its wings and dive. The two men in the forward cockpit threw up their arms for protection. Behind them the pilot pulled his control with a jerk that quivered the ship.

He was too slow. A jar as if the plane were a canoe crushing its bow on some sunken log, a whirling scream of flying splinters, then a terrifying roar as the freed engine raced wild. Their propeller was gone—shattered to a thousand pieces. The eagle had dived into their propeller and shattered it completely, paying with his life for his triumph.

THE air suddenly went quiet as the pilot cut his motor. The plane eased into a silent glide. All eyes stared down at the weaving carpet of rugged green with its blotches of barren rock peaks. Down at the beckoning river trail.

"Look for a landing place!" the pilot screamed, his voice loud in the unnatural stillness. "Our propeller's gone! We'll come down fast at this altitude."

Below, the earth and its wilderness seemed to lift toward them. The wilderness as God made it: trees, barren rocks, cliffs, black-streaked cañons. Only the narrow strip of glazed blue that marked the river seemed to offer a hope—a hope that vanished as it came. Below, as they lost altitude, the blue of the river changed to speckled white. Rapids! Swift water!

The prisoner followed the stare of the man at his side. That path of speckled blue seemed to beckon him. His eyes traveled with its course. He hooded them against the sun, then lifted his free arm to point. Far ahead a long, narrow strip of yellow loomed to one side of the white dotted lane of blue that marked the river.

The pilot instantly steadied the uncertain quiver of his ship as it fought against the shallowness of their glide. Ahead was a new hope—a sand bar, at the bend of the river. That yellow strip could be nothing else. A narrow bar hemmed in by black cliffs on either side of the river, but offering a possible landing.

There was clearance enough. They had altitude enough to glide the distance. The bar seemed smooth. If there only were no treacherous air currents to fight the controls!

The pilot felt cautiously for the wind. Steadily the earth leaped toward them. Down they rushed at a tangent to the bar. The air hissed past. The struts moaned their strain. The rolling mountain ridges to either side seemed to heave up like wave crests as the plane sank deeper within them.

"Free your safety belts!" the pilot suddenly screamed, as he sensed the treachery of the trap into which they were descending. "Brace yourselves! We're going to crack up. That bar's sunk in a cañon."

The plane seemed to take the words of warning as a command. Its wing dipped wildly to one side as it side-slipped in toward a towering wall of rock. The pilot fought the controls. The ship straightened. The tail skidded in an arc as a trick current caught it on the dip. Another side-slip. Another skid, then down plunged the nose. Down, as the black cañon walls closed in on either side. Down, as the yellow sand bar leaped up with its deadline of foam-whipped water.

PRISONER and captor alike fumbled with their safety belts. Brant got his free; his unmanacled left hand gripped the cowling. He caught a glimpse of the corporal bracing him-

self stiff. He stiffened his own body as the plane made a sickening drop, half spun, then dipped low on one wing.

There was a grinding crash, a splintering of struts, a groaning of ripped wood and, as if buoyed by an unseen hand, Brant felt his body lift to go sailing through the air. He felt a vicious tug of his cuffed wrist as he pawed for balance.

One great wing of the plane whipped past his face, the spray of dry sand stinging as it tore by. Then his body hit, sank into a cold nothingness, and twisted as the shocking chill of cold water drove him to struggle, even before the churning white closed above his head.

A few strokes and his free hand clawed sand. The tugging anchor of his manacled right wrist dragged heavily. He pulled in. The white face of the corporal dragged free of the current's sweep. With his burden, the prisoner crawled high up onto the sand. Dazed, he staggered to his knees. The corporal attempted to rise with him. A dozen feet away one lower wing of the plane, ripped free of the fuselage fastening, lay buried on end in the sand. Near it was Brant's pack.

Out in the maddened current rode the rest of the plane. Rode, but only for an instant. A pillar of white water. a dull crash above the current's roar, and the plane scattered itself about a sweeping whirlpool. Amongst the wreckage bobbed a leather helmet. A hand reached skyward, then sank as pilot and plane were sucked below.

Minutes passed as the two men lay sprawled upon the sand. At last the prisoner moved. He made to struggle to his feet. His cuffed wrist drew up the arm of the corporal.

The Mounty glanced up weakly. "Wait a minute," the corporal muttered. "Where do you think you're going?"

The prisoner now stood erect. His cuffed arm hung down. A mocking smile played for a moment at the corner of his lips.

"You needn't worry about my going any place," he spoke ironically, his words half drowned by the river's roar. "Neither one of us is going any place. We're trapped here on the bar."

The corporal struggled to his feet. "Trapped!" he echoed. "How trapped? There must be some way off this bar."

"There is," the prisoner answered. He nodded grimly down the cañon. "That's the way out."

"You mean?" The corporal followed the prisoner's stare downstream. The black cañon grinned back at him. He glanced up and scanned the smooth, wall-like cliffs to either side. His full realization of their misfortune showed in the draw of his features.

They were hopelessly trapped on a narrow sand bar deep within a winding cañon of the Fraser. The corporal seemed to forget his prisoner for the moment. His eyes searched the cliffs like a caged animal.

A lifting of the prisoner's arm snapped him from his daze. His glance dropped to the shiny handcuffs, then lifted across the sand to where the plane's wing stood planted on end. A few feet away lay the pack sack.

"There's blankets in my pack," the prisoner was saying. "If you'll take these cuffs off, I'll get them."

THE corporal for the first time became aware of the chill that was shaking him. An instant he hesitated, then, fishing a key from his pocket, he unsnapped the cuffs from

his own and the prisoner's wrists. "Bring the pack over here," he ordered as he pushed the cuffs in his pocket. "Try anything funny, and these go back on."

The prisoner answered with a meaning shrug. The policeman, he could see, had not yet realized how completely the crash had changed their situation. Brant lifted the pack across the sand to the corporal's feet. The corporal reached down, pulled free the protruding rifle and, glancing for an instant at the full cartridge belt wrapped about its stock, nodded for his prisoner to continue.

A jerk on the bag's end, and Brant had spread its contents on the sand. Silently the two men surveyed the result. Two blankets, a heavy hunting knife, a light hand ax, a frying pan, a small coffee pot, a light canvas sleeping bag and a few broken strands of rope made up the pack's load. The prisoner kicked them together and straightened.

The corporal seemed to ignore the smaller articles of the pile. Still holding to the rifle, he reached down and, shaking open one of the blankets, tossed it about him Indian fashion.

"Take one!" he barked at the prisoner; then, as his gaze once more sought the cliffs: "Just where are we —got any idea?"

BRANT nodded his head slowly. "I'm not sure," he spoke, a queer ironical lightness in his tone. "I believe I was through here once, years ago. It's called Devil's Cañon, a short cut through the range. The Indians use it sometimes. Not often, though. Bad water above and below here."

The corporal's face brightened. "Indians use it, eh?" he repeated. "There's a chance then. If we can get word out, they—"

The corporal halted. A sardonic chuckle from his prisoner held him. He stared across at the blanket-wrapped figure. "What are you laughing at, you fool?" the Mounty snapped. "You seem to be taking this all as a joke."

"I just said 'sometimes,' corporal," the prisoner repeated. "Sometimes—but not this late in the fall. No Indian is fool enough to try that water now. They use this short route through the Caribous only in the summer. There's no white water in the cañon then. A good man could make it. But now—the fall rains are doing *that*." The prisoner pointed to the foaming rapids.

Corporal McLeod did not answer. Again he searched the towering cliffs. The roar of the river, with the memory of its chill, satisfied him as to that barrier. The perpendicular walls of rock seemed to taunt him. The silence lapsed into hours as he squatted on the sand, staring up.

The prisoner seemed little affected. He had, when first clapped behind walls and bars, experienced the black horror of helpless resentment against a monstrous injustice. Now, he was more rational.

LEAVING the corporal to his black mood, he returned to the plane wing and, using the frying pan for a shovel, began hollowing out a shelter alongside it. With the few pieces of broken rope and gathered pieces of splintered struts for stakes, he quickly constructed a crude lean-to. With the canvas sleeping bag he rigged sides. Through it all a curious smile seemed ever glued to his lips.

From down the bar the corporal, rifle and belt still across his knees, gave a glance of inspection; then he strode over to assist.

"How long do you think we can

last in this damned place?" he asked. He had dropped the tone of command for the moment.

The prisoner gave a wary glance up at the cañon rim to where the cap of blue was darkening. He attempted to dissolve his mocking grin into a pensive stare.

"If the rains start," he finally answered, "not long. This bar will flood in a day. That would be the end. If the rains hold off—well, it takes time to starve."

The corporal did not answer. For hours the two men remained silent. The corporal drew tiny marks in the sand, covered them over, then traced them again. The sun remained hidden. There were no shadows upon the cañon walls. Slowly the day passed.

With evening the corporal searched the river edge and grimly placed marker stakes at each end of the bar. Back at the lean-to the prisoner had already rolled into his blanket and was breathing heavily. The corporal wrapped his own blanket about him and stretched out, not to sleep, but to fight the ghastly visions that drifted through the darkness before his eyes. It was his first experience as a caged thing.

With dawn he was up. He hurried to the river edge and searched for his marking stakes. His eyes widened as he sighted them. They stood half submerged, well out in the current. Wading out and pulling them free, he stared blankly at their water-soaked points. The river had risen a good foot during the night.

"Well," a voice spoke from shore, "at that rate we're good for a couple of days yet. It will take two feet more to cover the bar. That is, unless we're lucky and it pours. A day would do it then."

The corporal's eyes blazed as he glanced up. His prisoner, a taunting peacefulness in his stare, stood at the water's edge looking skyward. The corporal swallowed the envious curse that mounted to his lips. "What do you mean, lucky?" he barked. "You anxious to die?"

"No, not anxious," Brant answered, still staring up, "but—I'd rather drown than starve to death. What's the difference for me, anyway? A man may as well be dead as in some hell-hole of a prison, for life. I'd have killed myself back there when you caught me if I'd had the nerve. Now—the river will do that for me."

"You fool!" the corporal rasped. "You'll think differently when the water drives us to the cañon wall."

"Maybe," the prisoner mumbled. "I've been thinking of that, too. You've got my rifle there. You've shells for it. If the water gets too much, maybe I'll have the nerve then, if—if you'll let me use it."

"Shut up! This thing's got you already," the corporal bellowed, as he waded ashore. "You may give up without a fight, but I won't. There must be some way out of this hole. Some way besides—"

"Besides drowning like a couple of rats?" The prisoner's voice held that strange note of mockery again as he dropped his eyes from the towering cliff. Then, answering his own words, "There is; you can drown fighting, like that poor devil of a pilot. It's only four miles to where the cañon opens. Who knows? A man *might* make it. There's a chance—but you can take it, I won't. I'm satisfied to wait and take mine the other way. It's sure, and one wouldn't get so battered first."

"You're going mad, you fool—mad," Corporal McLeod rasped as he

glared at Brant. "There's a way out of here. There must be a way out of here. There's a way out of everything if only a man—"

"If only a man has the urge, corporal," Brant finished the speech with a faint smile. "If only he has the urge."

THE corporal seemed to straighten at the words.

"What—what do you mean?" he stammered. "Urge? Urge? What're you driving at?"

"Nothing, corporal, nothing. I was just thinking, is all," the prisoner mumbled. "Thinking of what I might be able to do if I had the . . . urge. You know, corporal, those gray walls of the cañon over there sort of remind me of those walls at Dominion Penitentiary. Not in size, of course, you understand, but—well, they're the walls of our prison, aren't they? I escaped past walls like those, once."

The corporal swallowed hard. His tongue wet his dry lips as he swayed weakly. "You mean, Brant—you mean you could . . .?" The Mounty chewed at his words.

"Oh, nothing sure, corporal; nothing sure," Brant rambled on. "You see, back at Dominion I had the urge. There was freedom beyond — the woods, the old trails, that memory of the sun just creeping up over the Caribous. That was an urge for home. Something worth trying for. But this —well, one hell is no better than another. From here it would be back to Dominion for me. No, I think I'm satisfied."

The corporal made a quick step forward as he grasped his prisoner's shoulders. "Listen, Brant, listen," he half gasped, his voice holding a desperate plea. "Don't be a fool, man, don't be a fool. If you know a way out of this trap, tell me! Don't you realize, man, that river is rising every minute? A minute may mean the saving of our lives."

The prisoner's eyes met his, steadily. "Don't get me wrong, corporal. I didn't say I knew a way out. I said I was just thinking of how I might find a way if I had—well, if I had that same urge I had back at Dominion. You understand. Freedom, old trails, home . . . A man could think clearly if he had a goal like that to look forward to."

The corporal's hands pulled away from their grasp on the prisoner's shoulders and dropped to his sides. His eyes seemed to narrow and grow steadier as he drew himself erect. A moment he stared in silent appraisal at the man before him. McLeod's jaws lost their trapped snarl. "What 're you trying to do, Brant?" he said in a low, level tone. "Strike a bargain with me for your freedom?"

"Why not? Suppose I find a way out. Suppose my freedom is a part of the bargain. Corporal McLeod would report the crash of his plane in Devil's Cañon. No chance for doubt or suspicion there.

"He would report the death of pilot —and prisoner. The corporal's word would go for that. Then he would report his own escape. You understand, not necessarily from the cañon. The ship might have crashed in the river just at the cañon mouth. There is the answer to everything. You may be sure the prisoner would stay 'dead' —he would never give cause for any one to doubt the corporal's word. And the pilot— Sort of like a fairy tale plot, isn't it, corporal? And yet it may solve our problem."

The corporal took a step back. His

eyes held a cold stare. "Brant," he snapped, "I get your game now. That's why you've been acting up under this as if it were a joke. You thought you could force me into something. Force me into giving you your freedom for your plan of escape. I'll see you in Hades first! If there's a way out of here, I'll find it. Find it and take you back to Dominion where you belong."

A shrug from the prisoner was the only answer—as if to say, once more he had gambled, and lost.

The corporal walked to the water's edge and began pacing the sand. The prisoner made back to the lean-to, sank to the sand, and stared thoughtfully up at the cliffs above. The day passed until night's shadows dropped about them.

HOURS later the corporal entered the lean-to. Outside, the cañon now and then lit with a yellow glow that painted its black walls as if in a flame light. With each flash a low, thundering rumble echoed down from above. In the darkness the sand began to rattle with the patter of raindrops. Against the tightly stretched cover of the sheltering plane wing, it beat like a drum. There was no thought of sleep for the corporal.

Twice in an hour he made a trip to his measuring stakes. The river was rising fast, crawling steadily up his marker. Each time he returned the prisoner rolled lazily in his sleep and broke anew into a peaceful snore. To the corporal the sound was a taunt. Death was creeping up on them and yet the man slept. Slept with some secret plan of escape locked behind his lips. Some plan—some solution of the impossible.

The corporal cursed half aloud as the thought ran through his brain. Was it really a plan or was it a vengeful man's ruse to torture his captor? It must be that. It could be nothing else. McLeod had searched every foot of the bar, searched every foot of the cliff, searched every foot of the shore. They were within an impregnable prison of stone and water—mounting gray walls and swift white water. A perfect prison.

The corporal's brain seemed to pound as the thought flashed: Dominion was considered impregnable; Dominion was considered a perfect prison; yet this man had escaped it—thought his way out of it.

A rumble of thunder echoed down through the cañon. The beating rain seemed to grow louder. The roar of the river swallowed the thunder's echo as it died. But the heavy breathing of the prisoner continued, maddeningly. The corporal leaped to his feet and rushed down to the shore to resume pacing its creeping line.

WITHIN the lean-to, Brant raised himself cautiously on one elbow, listening in the darkness. The scrape of the corporal's feet in the sand sounded above the river's roar.

Brant sat erect. His hand groped out into the darkness. His breath caught as his fingers touched cold steel—the rifle. He pulled it into his lap. In the darkness he fumbled with the mechanism. There was a shell in the barrel. He pulled himself about and sprawled out to face the lean-to's open side. Again he listened for the corporal's footsteps. They still sounded. The hammer of his rifle clicked back. He waited.

An hour passed. Still he waited, patiently, inexorably. The corporal still paced the bar. The prisoner moved tensely as he listened to the river's ris-

ing roar. Was the man ever going to return to the shelter? Brant would be foolish to venture out into the darkness after him. A sound, any warning, and his plan of escape was spoiled. He must save every shell. For the Mounty he could spare only one. One shot, point-blank, as McLeod crept back into the lean-to, and he was free.

Free for the wild plan that from the first day of their imprisonment had beckoned down at him from halfway up the towering walls. Free for one last gamble with death—a gamble with freedom the urging stake.

The drum of the rain against the plane wing seemed to mock his thoughts. The rain, that was his deadliest remaining enemy. Even with the corporal disposed of, he would still have the rain to battle, and that rising water as it crept up the bar. Would he have time?

Another hour passed. Still the corporal held to the shore. Within the lean-to the prisoner still waited. A gray mist seemed to be dissolving the blackness; the gray, drifting mist of dawn. Gradually it crept between the cañon walls.

Suddenly the prisoner scrambled to his knees and peered beyond the lean-to. A dim blur had moved at the water's edge but a few yards away. Now it turned and moved back down the shore. The corporal, as he paced through the grayness. The prisoner raised his rifle and waited. The corporal would retrace his steps. It would bring him closer. Brant must not risk a miss.

The sand echoed a splash. The corporal was at the end of the bar. He was turning to retrace his steps. Now was the time.

The prisoner pulled the rifle stock well back into his shoulder. His eye bent to the sight. His finger crooked about the trigger. A moment he poised, waiting. A shapeless form loomed through the waiting gray. Slowly it advanced.

The prisoner centered his sight on the figure. His finger upon the trigger tightened. Tightened, then hesitated as the shapeless shadow in the gray grew larger, grew clearer. His finger trembled, as the advancing corporal halted suddenly and stared grimly at the pointed rifle barrel protruding from beyond the lean-to's edge.

The corporal's hand dropped to his holster. His dripping, rain-soaked clothing bulged as he half crouched, ready to spring, in a last desperate attempt to beat a bullet. But slowly the rifle was lowering. Over its stock showed the face of the prisoner. Not the face with its mocking grin, but the face of a beaten man.

"You win, corporal," a choked voice stammered. "You—you win."

"DROP that gun," came the corporal's growl, as, with a quick step forward, his hand snatched the rifle barrel and pushed it aside.

"Take it," muttered the prisoner. The rifle slipped through fingers quivering in uncontrollable reaction. The corporal picked it up and lowered the hammer to safety. His eyes blazed as he stared down at the prisoner.

"What were you going to do, murder me?" The corporal's words ground themselves from between clenched teeth.

"Murder you? Me murder you?" Brant half sneered at himself. "Not even for my own life. You win, corporal. I'm not a killer, that's all. Not for any stake. God, man, you don't know! I've been waiting here to kill you all night. I had the

sights of that rifle on you since you turned down from the end of the bar, but—I couldn't pull the trigger."

"You planned to kill me all along?" The corporal's voice was low, puzzled.

"Don't be a fool, corporal," the prisoner answered. "I planned to kill you as a last resort. When you refused to promise my freedom, then my only way out was to kill you. Kill you while I still had the chance to beat the rising river and escape myself. But I couldn't make my finger close down on that trigger. You win. I lose. I'll pay my stakes."

"Your stakes?" the corporal echoed.

The prisoner was struggling to his feet. "Come on," he called, stepping out past the lean-to. "You want to die fighting. Here's your chance. The chance I was going to take for myself. You can have it. There's one chance of beating the river. It's yours for the taking."

Brant now stood at the water's edge. His eyes stared up to the rising cliffs across, where the grayness of dawn was gradually changing to the shadowed whiteness of day. "Look halfway up that cliff," he commanded. "See that strip of black? Watch it. Watch it every minute, there where it bends out around the bulge in the cliff-side. There's our chance."

The corporal's eyes lifted. He caught the prisoner's markings. A black streak along the cliff's side. A narrow black streak leading upward.

"It's some kind of a ledge or trail," the corporal half whispered, as his eyes held to the smooth wall. "It leads up; but, Brant, it doesn't lead down!"

"Watch it," the prisoner repeated.

The corporal did as he was bid. Minutes passed. Minutes that mounted. Still the black line shone bare. Then suddenly the corporal straightened his body. His lifted eyes narrowed as he peered. His hands groped for his prisoner.

"Brant! Brant!" he cried hoarsely. "There's something moving up there! Something white. It's moving along the ledge like— Brant!" The corporal's voice was hopeful, puzzled. "It's—it's a mountain goat."

"Give me the rifle," the prisoner snapped, as he half swung about. "You're shaking like a pup. You couldn't hit the cliff. You fool, that's the answer to life and death."

BRANT jerked the rifle from the corporal's hand. The Mounty still stared up as his lips moved in mumbled words.

"Watch it!" the prisoner barked, as he pulled the rifle stock against his cheek. "If my aim is true, that animal should clear the ledge and land well out in the river. The sweep of the current should bring it near the end of the bar. Be ready to go after it as it floats by."

The rifle steadied. High up on the cliff the moving ball of white made slowly for the fold-like bend in the cliff's wall. At last it reached the ledge's narrowest point. The white head of a mountain goat moved past. In that instant the rifle cracked.

Up on the cliff the white ball seemed to leap into the air, struggle for a footing, then come sailing down, down toward the foaming waters of the river. A geyser-like splash in the current, and the tumbling white ball was bobbing amid the rapids as the water swept it in toward the end of the bar.

Waist-deep, the corporal waited. A minute, and he was dragging the dead animal on to the sand.

The prisoner still stood with eyes uplifted, searching the cliff above. As

the corporal dragged the prize toward the lean-to, he called to him. The corporal dropped the dead animal and answered. The prisoner handed him the rifle.

"Watch the ledge," he spoke. "If we can get four of these, we've made it. That ledge is a mountain goat trail. I've been watching them ever since we've been here. They pass back and forth along it constantly. Watch it and try to get every one that rounds the bulge."

With his words the prisoner turned and rushed to the lean-to. A second, and he was bending over the dead mountain goat, his hunting knife moving with the slash of an expert. He began skinning the animal, not with the wide belly slash of the hunter, but with a careful pulling and tearing process.

The head was cut free high up on the neck. Then slowly the hide was peeled back, as a man would roll a sock from off his foot. Only at the leg joints was the skin cut and freed. It was slow, tedious work, but at last, turned inside out, the skin came free.

The corporal cast wondering glances toward his co-worker on the sand. He saw the prisoner salvage the rope about their lean-to and unbraid it into small strands. Watched him take these strands and snare tight each opening in the skinned hide. Then at last, unbelieving as he watched, saw the man begin blowing up the hide with his mouth, not unlike a boy blowing a toy balloon.

The curiously-shaped skin began to swell until it formed a great sausage-like tube. Then the corporal began to understand.

Already the prisoner had pulled down the sheltering plane wing. Now with long strips ripped from his canvas sleeping bag, he was lashing the air-filled hide to the wing's side.

The corporal saw light. With the air-filled skin as a float, the prisoner was constructing a raft from the plane wing. A raft to carry them on down the cañon's course.

An hour passed. Once again the rifle cracked. This time the prisoner retrieved the corporal's victim. Again he set to his work.

THE corporal held to his watch until, with a sudden darkening of the sky, the rain began to whip down in torrents. The ledge high above was buried behind its misty screen.

The corporal cursed as he hunched his shoulders against the beating drops. He glanced down. He was standing in water to his ankles. Since he had taken his post the river had risen that much. Would they have time?

The prisoner had completed his second pontoon. He now stood with rusted frying pan in his hand, lashing it with tight wrappings of the stripped sleeping bag to a long piece of wing strut. A minute, and the contrivance took the shape of a crude paddle. Brant groped about for the hand ax, and began pounding out the coffeepot into a flat pan-shaped object, the possible blade of a second paddle.

For half an hour the rain beat down. Gradually the river crawled higher. The plane wing, two clumsy floats fast along its edge, lay upon the sand. The water at the river edge lapped at it. The two men lifted the wing back hard against the cliff. Still the rain poured. Prisoner and corporal stared up, striving to peer through the blinding mist screen.

Abruptly the rain ceased. A lacy mist drifted down in its wake. The black line of the ledge above had dissolved itself in the rain-soaked rock.

Both men searched above. At last came their reward. Again the rifle cracked. Again the prisoner struggled in the current—struggled as the water swept his feet from beneath him and for an instant seemed about to carry him on down stream.

The extended gun-barrel of the corporal, who stood waist-deep in the current, drew him in. The prisoner hurried to his work. There was a gruesome delay as the neck-opening of this goat stubbornly leaked air, but it was finally made fast. The corporal held to his watch. The water crept steadily up the bar.

They now stood with backs against the bar wall. The sand was completely submerged. The water lapped at their feet as it crawled. Then again the rain began to pour.

"Can we make it with three?" the corporal shouted, as he watched his prisoner lash the last float to the plane wing.

"One of us, maybe," the prisoner snapped back. "Not two. She won't ride level, or handle. We have to avoid those whirlpools below."

The corporal swung his eyes up. A thick mist was dropping down between the cañon walls. Gradually it settled.

"There's no chance for another one on the ledge," McLeod said at last. "Look how the mist is thickening."

The prisoner did not answer. He was staring down at the water, now against the cliff edge. The bar was completely submerged. Out on the river the current had lost most of its foam-whipped spray, as the rising water now raced down the cañon.

"We can't wait any longer," the prisoner suddenly spoke. "If she rises any higher, she'll begin to sweep in against the cañon wall. Get ready. You go alone."

"Alone?" The corporal whirled half about as he balanced for a footing against the sand that seemed to melt beneath his feet. "Alone, nothing. We'll both go."

"We can't. The wing will never ride with two. There's no chance of another float. You go. I'll stay. I'd as soon stay here and take what's coming to me as go back to prison."

THE water was creeping to their knees. They held to their rude raft to steady it against the current. The corporal swept his eyes up to the prisoner. Once more the queer smile was playing at the corner of Brant's lips. His eyes seemed to reflect a sort of grim contentment.

The prisoner met McLeod's glance, and pushed out the handles of the paddles he held. "Get ready," he shouted, his voice hollow in the roar of the current.

The corporal's eye caught a swinging brown object hung to the plane wing's edge—Brant's heavy, waterproof pack sack.

McLeod's fingers gripped tighter at the few pieces of brush that pushed out from the cliff edge as it met the sand. He struggled for footing as that empty pack sack flashed a hope. A fourth float! It might work.

He grabbed for the heavy knife stuck in Brant's belt. Quickly he slashed the thin brush boughs. Into the pack sack he stuffed them. Then, shouting his plan as he worked, he gathered the bag's flap together and snared it close like a filled gunnysack.

He pushed it toward Brant, who had already caught the idea, and had the lashing ready. As he struggled for balance against the now waist-deep current, he made fast the last float.

Quickly they set their crude raft atop

the water. A minute they tested it for balance. She rode level. The corporal took a position forward. The prisoner squatted aft. Their paddles poised.

"Ready?" shouted Brant.

"Ready," answered McLeod.

The prisoner released his grip on the cañon wall. The current reached for them—caught them, swept them toward the river center. Their paddles dipped deep. Down with the hiss of the racing water they swept, down between the towering walls of their prison.

Whirlpools tugged at them. They pulled clear. Mountains of white-thrashed foam loomed ahead. They swept around. Leering rocks leaped into their path. They dodged.

Twisting, turning, battling the pull of the current, they raced on. On, until, with a suddenness that seemed to scream the cry of victory, the cañon walls fell back as the raging river fanned out into a lake-like smoothness. They paddled to the shore. The Poplar Flats received them.

CORPORAL and prisoner lay sprawled on the river bank. High on the shore rested their craft. The corporal struggled to his feet. The prisoner followed. "How far is it to Meekmat?" the corporal asked.

"Not far," the prisoner answered. "Straight down the river. We can ride the raft down. It's smooth water the rest of the way."

The corporal did not answer. Suddenly he stepped to the raft. In its center lay the rifle with its cartridge belt. He picked it up and walked back toward the prisoner.

"Here, Brant," he said. "Take it and get going. You're not a killer, I know that. Neither am I. Anyway, you had already won back there on the bar. I was coming back to the lean-to to tell you your bargain was a go when —when I found out you never could be a killer. Not even with all your urge."

THE END.

Old Rifle Held in Tree

NEAR the city of Chehalis, Washington, is one of the strangest relics in the country; and it typifies the spirit of the Old West. More than half a century ago, an old rifle laid in the crotch of a small oak tree was forgotten by the person who placed it there. As the years passed, the oak grew over the old firearm, eventually locking it firmly in the grasp of its twelve-inch hardwood fingers.

There is much speculation among the citizens of that part of the country as to why the old rifle was placed in the oak tree, but it is generally believed that the old weapon was placed there when peace was declared between the white men and the Indians as a symbol that there would never be any more trouble between the two races. Several years ago, the old tree with its unique relic was cut just above the ground and above the gun and it has been on exhibition in the Washington city since that time.

Frank S. Reynolds.

A woman stumbled through the door

The Maverick

Donald McKay sees stark horror swoop down on the rangeland while he is a prisoner in the secret lair of the outlaw who had murdered his father

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

Author of "The Hawk of Hazard," "It's a Bargain!" etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

OPHIR, a tough Arizona town twenty miles north of the railroad, is suspected as the headquarters of train robbers, and President Tipton of the road insists on coming to investigate in person.

Donald McKay, an orphaned wanderer who has been nicknamed the Maverick, arrives in Ophir on a private search for one William Oliver, and finds himself suspected by all concerned.

James Harvey, most influential man in Ophir, is trying to get Tipton to put a branch road through, to tap his mine properties; but Colonel Sutherland is equally determined no railroad shall cross his range.

The Maverick, waylaid, kills his bushwhacker, who bears the credentials of Federal Detective Patterson, and he is jailed. Tipton's daughter Roberta turns against him in horror; but Janice Sutherland, disguised as a cowboy, sticks up the jailer and frees him—though she maintains she knows he is a guilty man. A two-fisted preacher, Ben Lawrence, tells the fugitive Donald that his victim was probably Patterson's outlaw murderer, and gives McKay directions how to reach Lookout Butte, which Patterson, Lawrence's fellow detective, thought was the outlaw stronghold.

In a storm McKay rides up the long inclined ramp to the tunnel entrance

This story began in the Argosy for November 15.

of the hollow atop Lookout Butte, and finds himself face to face with Oliver. He gives the outlaw more than six thousand dollars, half of the fortune of Donald's late benefactor, the prospector John Whitman, whom Oliver had grubstaked years before. But Donald recognizes Oliver as the horse thief who had murdered his father and made him a maverick.

The outlaws are called out by a message from "the chief," Oliver's superior, to raid the unguarded Sutherland ranch and seize Tipton and his daughter; and Donald is sure the chief is Sutherland himself. He arranges for the escape of Bess Nelson, a captive of Oliver, and charges her to notify Lawrence of the proposed raid. He asks her also to give the Sutherlands a secret warning to flee the country. But the raid has already taken place, and Tipton's private secretary, Baines, arrives in Ophir with the news.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BRAINS OF THE OUTLAW GANG.

DETECTIVE KILGORE of the railroad and the Reverend Ben Lawrence were still staring at each other in consternation over Baines's terrified story of the kidnaping of the Tiptons and Janice Sutherland, when a woman stumbled through the half open door, a rifle in her hand. At sight of the savage-looking tramp of a railroad detective she halted in alarm.

"Have no fear in this house," said Lawrence soothingly. "If you are in trouble, madam, I will protect you."

The woman looked at him keenly. Her alarm faded.

"I'm lookin' fer the Reverend Ben Lawrence," she stated.

"I am he," replied Lawrence calmly, gesturing at the other two men for silence.

The woman looked at the others suspiciously.

"You are among friends, madam," said Lawrence earnestly. "Don't let appearances deceive you. Remember, the King of Kings trod this earth as a lowly carpenter."

"Yuh're the man I've come to see, all right," the woman nodded decisively. "I've got some private news fer yuh—from Donald McKay."

Kilgore uttered a sharp cry, and even Lawrence could not repress a start of eagerness.

"Here and now is the place and time to tell it," the minister said quickly.

"My name is Bess Nelson," said the woman swiftly. "I've come from Donald McKay at the outlaw settlement on Lookout Butte, whar I been a prisoner fer six months. I come as quick as I could, but I couldn't git away afore eight o'clock."

"Nelson!" crisped out Kilgore. "You are the missing widow of the murdered station agent at Cliffs?"

Bess Nelson nodded, eying the speaker curiously.

"This is Mr. Kilgore, Mrs. Nelson," informed Lawrence. "And this is Mr. Baines, secretary to the president of the railroad. You must pardon his appearance—"

Bess Nelson interrupted with a faint cry as she looked again at the dishevéled Baines.

"They have already raided the ranch!" she exclaimed.

"Your message!" demanded Kilgore and Lawrence together.

And Bess extended the note from the outlaws' chief, as she repeated word for word the verbal message from the Maverick.

"Can you lead me back the way you came?" was Kilgore's first question. He was oblivious of her condition; the scent of the hot trail had filled his nostrils.

"No," said Lawrence firmly; "she cannot. But some of the WR punchers know the way. I know where to find Colonel Sutherland, too."

"I'd better describe Eagle's Nest to yuh," said Bess. "It's hard to git in an' almost impossible to git out—if they don't want yuh to." She did so carefully.

"Now, what shall be our first move?" Kilgore asked.

Lawrence looked up from a comparison of the outlaw chief's order with a sheet of writing he had taken from his pocket.

"Before you start after the outlaws," he said, "we'll lay our hands on Sutherland. You'll need his men, anyhow. Right now, let's call on Harvey."

"What shall I do?" cried Baines nervously.

Lawrence turned toward the neglected secretary.

"You can help best," he said kindly, "by finding a doctor and taking him back to the WR ranch as fast as he can go. Wait there until you hear from us."

"I'll go with yuh, Mr. Baines," said the woman quickly. "I have to go out to the Sutherland place."

Baines and the courageous Bess departed.

ARE you ready, Mr. Kilgore?" the minister demanded.

For answer the detective handed back the two sheets of paper which Lawrence had given him for comparison. "Lead on," he said.

They found the geologist alone in his little rock office. Harvey looked up in frowning surprise at the entrance of the two men. He eyed the filthy-looking Kilgore askance.

Lawrence wasted no words in coming to the object of his visit.

"Mr. Harvey," he said gravely, "this is Detective Kilgore of the St. Louis & Western Railroad. Me, you already know, although I might add that I am a special agent of the United States Government for the time being."

"Indeed?" Harvey raised his eyebrows. "You surprise me."

Mr. Kilgore produced a gun at the introduction, and the geologist started to his feet with an ejaculation on his lips.

"Sit down!" said Kilgore. "Reverend Lawrence will do the talking."

Like a man of stone Harvey dropped into his seat. He remained rigid and silent throughout the remainder of the interview. He fixed his eyes on the preacher's face, ignoring the muzzle of the weapon which was sighted in precise line with his heart.

"We have called," went on Lawrence calmly, "to return to you a note you sent to William Oliver at Eagle's Nest early this afternoon—yesterday afternoon, to be exact, as it is now considerably past midnight. Do you recognize it?"

Jim Harvey did not even glance at the half-extended paper. He continued to stare into the minister's stern eyes.

"It would interest you to know how we got this paper," resumed Lawrence after a brief pause. "You are speculating on whether your instructions were carried out and what effect that will have on your present situation. That is a long story over which you can reflect in prison.

"Briefly, the facts are these: You are known to us as the brains of this Oliver gang. You sent instructions to your marksman Tom Stohl by your regular messenger, the cook Munns, to kill the man exploring around Lookout Butte. You didn't know he was a Federal detective until later. Stohl held out the proceeds from rifling the body. Then, thinking Donald McKay was a railroad detective, you sent him to Ophir from Bradley's clearing and sent Munns to Stohl with orders to kill McKay on his way back with the horses.

"It is useless to deny these charges. Munns is ready to testify against you. He lost faith in you when you made a compact with Tipton to round up the outlaw gang in exchange for a spur railroad into Ophir.

"There are numerous other details of your double game which I have gathered laboriously and with which I won't burden you now. Let it suffice that the final crushing proof is the matter of your scholarly handwriting on this sheet of paper. It is identical with other specimens of your signed work which I have in my possession.

"It is folly to contemplate violence of any sort. All of your actual band are hemmed in on Lookout Butte by the posse which pursued them from the train robbery at Cliffs. Your two confederates in the railroad employ, at Holbrook and Flagstaff, have already been arrested, and the streets of this town are patrolled by WR punchers under the command of their employer. Have you anything to say before Mr. Kilgore takes you into custody? Verily, my misguided friend, the way of the transgressor is hard."

Jim Harvey might have been a mummy, for all the emotion he showed. He stared into the stern face of Lawrence for a long moment after the latter had ceased talking. At last he permitted his gaze to flick to the grimly silent Kilgore with the steady revolver. What thoughts passed through his mind at this abrupt and utter collapse of his deep-laid plans on the very verge of success no one ever knew.

"You win, gentlemen," he said quietly. "I surrender."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ATTACK ON LOOKOUT BUTTE.

THE rest of his life Donald McKay was to recall that night with loathing. He considered it the sorriest episode in his turbulent career. Had he not begun it by betraying the only living friend he had, Ben Lawrence, in sending a warning to Sutherland, secret chief of the outlaws, so the latter and his daughter could escape? Had he not permitted a lone woman to carry his messages through the wild mountains at night while he rested comfortably and securely in the bandits' stronghold? And had he not spent the rest of the night drinking and gambling with three outlaws and five questionable women?

In reality he had executed the neatest coup of his life. He sent, in the only manner possible to him, and at the psychological moment, a full and comprehensive message to Ben Lawrence. He sent, unknown to himself, a declaration of love to Janice Sutherland. He gave to Bess Nelson the first ray of hope in a life darkened by tragedy. And, without being a drinker or gambler by nature, he staged a party the like of which had never been seen before at Eagle's Nest.

With a five-gallon keg of the ban-

dits' liquor and reckless I O U notes on his bank account at Fort Wingate he centered attention on himself so completely that Bess Nelson had not the slightest trouble in making her escape. In brief, he "whooped 'er up, 'Liza Jane."

From seven o'clock until twelve he plied the outlaws indiscriminately with their own liquor and his notes. They cheated him flagrantly and clumsily, and he cheated them in the number of drinks he took with them. But he held them to him with the bonds of greed until they began to drop out of the poker game one by one to fall asleep with a handful of his I O U's upon them.

Midnight slowly drew near and passed. The hour for relieving the two guards on duty went by unnoticed, and Jack Maple slumbered peacefully on, his head on the table by an overturned cup and a s h e a f of the Maverick's pledges in his fist. It was the giant blacksmith Dave Canwell and the red-haired woman who gave the most trouble and proved the final undoing of Donald himself. They had drinking capacities which would have been the envy of a first-class tank.

At last, however, about one o'clock Canwell toppled out of his chair. Without rousing, he rolled onto his back and began snoring lustily.

The woman laughed foolishly and eyed the Maverick with bleary gaze.

"Party's over, deary," she hiccoughed, and fell asleep in her chair.

Idly Donald continued shuffling the stained and greasy cards for a moment as he surveyed the havoc about him. Under the flickering light of the lamp it was an eloquent scene. Chairs were overturned; men and women lay scattered about in various stages of dishevelment. Liquor was spilled over everything. Fumes and tobacco smoke filled the room like an evil fog. The fire had died down. And Donald was beginning to feel deathly sick.

He fought down his nausea and got stiffly to his feet. Quite noisily he built up the fire. Not a soul was disturbed. So he methodically made the rounds and collected all of the I O U notes in sight. He went so far as to search the pockets of the men very thoroughly. So far as he could tell, there were only a few missing, which the women had secreted upon their persons. It did not make much difference. If things broke right, he would never be called on to cash them. If t h i n g s broke wrong, he wouldn't live to cash them.

Carefully he placed the pile he had collected in the heart of the now roaring fire. He watched them burn to a black c r i s p. And all the while his nausea mounted. Then, suffocating for want of fresh air, he staggered to the door and flung it wide open. It was astonishing how dizzy he was and how fuzzy his tongue had become.

THE fresh air momentarily cleared his head. Now was a golden opportunity to escape. The way was clear and there wasn't a soul to oppose him. Why hadn't he thought of this before, so as to have spared Bess Nelson the ordeal of that trip? Somehow, his mind wasn't functioning quite as clearly as it should. This was annoying.

But escape was the thing. He turned back into the room for his hat. Sight of the pair of six-shooters about the waist of the slumbering Dave Canwell reminded him that he was unarmed. He knelt and laboriously removed the gun belts, clumsily buckling them about his own slim waist. The rush of blood to his head finished him.

As he rose to his feet he staggered ludicrously. To save himself he caught hold of the nearest bedpost. The fact that a smaller quantity of whisky might do for him what a vast quantity had done for the others had not occurred to him. Hence, in goggling amazement he swayed there for a long moment. Then he fell across the bed in a prone position where he lay without moving.

It was thus that the returning raiders found matters at two o'clock in the morning.

Oliver halted in the open door, and his evil face went black with anger.

"Of all the damned, stinkin', lousy coyotes!" he snarled. "Two men dead drunk at the tunnel an' every buzzard here stewed to the eyes. Maple! Damn yore hide! Maple!"

But Maple snored lustily on. The outlaw leader roared out a command.

"Take them prisoners an' lock 'em up in the lil cabin," he directed. "Then come back here."

Thus Donald was spared the crowning ignominy of being seen in his present plight by the woman he had kissed and the woman he loved.

Oliver strode into the room. The huge form of Dave Canwell was stretched out in his way, and he bestowed a hearty kick in the blacksmith's ribs as he passed. This drew no more than a disturbed grunt. Furious, his rage mounting murderously with each passing moment, the outlaw captain grasped his lieutenant by the shoulder and flung him to the floor.

"Water!" he bellowed harshly to the men crowding in at the door. "Souse 'em with plenty o' water. Git these females outa here. Maple! Where is—"

His eyes fell upon the form of the Maverick upon the bed, and his rage abated the merest trifle. Swiftly he crossed to the bedside and rolled the occupant over.

Donald groaned and opened his eyes. He stared up dully. Then, recollection coming to him, he struggled to a sitting position. He propped his heavy head up with both hands, elbows on knees.

"So they likkered yuh up good an' plenty, too?" snapped Oliver. "At thet, yuh're the soberest one o' the bunch. How'd it happen?"

The Maverick raised his head with difficulty. His gaze fell upon the nearly emptied whisky keg on the table and he shuddered. He was a very sick young man.

A fleeting puzzled expression passed over the outlaw captain's face.

"Damned if yuh don't remind me o' somebody I knowed some'eres," he frowned. "C'mon! What happened?"

"We—we started playing poker after supper," Donald said thickly. "I g-guess we drank too much."

Oliver laughed mirthlessly.

"I guess yuh did," he mocked. "Go soak yore head in the waterin' trough so yuh can talk."

Donald did not move. Deliberately Oliver drove his fist into the seated man's face, sprawling him back upon the bed.

"Go soak yore head," he repeated viciously. "If yuh don't know it, ev'ry member o' this gang moves when the captain speaks. Two o' yuh men help 'im out. Padgett, sling thet water over Maple an' bring 'im out of it. Jes' git 'im awake; I'll sober 'im up."

HALF-SUPPORTED between two of the outlaws, the Maverick stumbled out of the house. He was boiling with helpless anger and deathly sick. His stomach completely revolted. One of the outlaws obligingly

poured a bucket of icy water over his head. Then the attention of the two men was called elsewhere, and the Maverick was left to himself.

He was cold sober now, but he felt trembly and weak. He dried his hair and face as well as he could with his hands. With an effort he got up and started walking. He was anxious to get far away from the scene of the party and the presence of Oliver. He made for the stone wall at its farthest point on the lip of the precipice. He found himself too miserably ill to make it.

At the last cabin in the amphitheater, a small and dark little structure, he stopped to rest. He sat down on the steps and leaned his head back against the door. In this position he fell into an uneasy slumber which lasted while Oliver scourged his negligent men into sobriety and the sky flushed faintly along the east with the coming of dawn.

Freed from the dominion of his will, Donald's mind rambled prodigally and exhibited a surprising and impossible combination of facts and fancies. Fragments of the weary years gone by, suppressed longings which reveled in unbridled f r e e d o m, flashes of queer knowledge Donald had not known he possessed, ridiculously mingled episodes of past and present.

Like disconnected pictures, perfectly logical at the moment and then retiring into the nothingness from whence they came, these vague d r e a m s flitted through his mind.

At last they assumed a definite form, and he found himself on his horse in the center of a wide, fertile valley. Far in the hazy distance loomed the formidable bulk of a mountain. Milling and plunging about him were hundreds, thousands of horses. He was riding hard on them. A closer inspection revealed an astonishing fact. The vast herd of horses was but one horse multiplied a thousandfold. At each animal he looked he saw a splendid yellow gelding with a white blaze on the intelligent face and the brand WR on its flank.

They were the same horse—the horse stolen by his father's murderers.

And then, far across the plain, a figure moved toward him. He recognized it successively as different people he had known. And suddenly, with vivid clearness, it became the highly desirable form of Roberta Tipton. He reached her side and kissed her, and found that she had become Janice Sutherland.

At this instant a vast hand reached out of the distant mountain and snatched her away. He looked, and the old familiar demon of his dreams towered above him, holding the helpless Janice in one hand and a huge cannon in the other.

With that clairvoyance of dreams Donald knew that Oliver's cannon would blow him to pieces if he advanced one step. And he knew that he was going to advance that step without faltering. He moved forward. Everything shattered into blackness at the utter cataclysm which resulted—and he started awake with the sound of the explosion still in his ears.

It was dawn. The ground was trembling beneath him, the mountains were still echoing with a mighty reverberation, and a man's scream of mortal agony was cut short by an unseen avalanche of rock which thundered down into the abyss far below.

For a stunned and breathless moment there was a ghastly silence. Then the figure of a man emerged from the mouth of the tunnel to the outer world

and came in a staggering run across the clearing.

"Oliver! Oliver!" Donald heard his faint cry. "Somepin' blew up the outer end o' the tunnel! Hoffman was buried alive in the watch cave. I'm—bleedin' to death!"

THE camp was completely aroused. Men in various stages of undress poured from the cabins, guns in hands. Women were shrieking. Horses were plunging madly out of the stable caverns. And Donald started as a terrific pounding began on the door at his back.

"What's happened? Let us out of here!" the heavy voice of W. Claude Tipton came through the barrier in a frantic shout.

The alarmed voices of women blended with the railroad president's bull-like bellow, and the Maverick remembered the prisoners Oliver had gone after the night before.

Everything was pandemonium in the ghostly light of daybreak. And then a shot rang out from the direction of the lookout nest high up on the peak. A wild cattleman's yell followed.

"Ahoy, Eagle's Nest! We've dynamited yore rat-hole up tight. There's a posse of thirty men scattered along the mountainside overlookin' yore camp. They all got rifles. Is it surrender, or fight?"

The lanky figure of Jack Maple went flashing across the clearing.

"Oliver!" the lieutenant was shouting. "Where the devil is Oliver? Jumpin' on me fer sleepin' off a drunk! Oliver!"

"He said he was goin' up to the lookout at daybreak," bawled another man hysterically. "What we gonna do, Jack?"

Donald feverishly examined the fastening of the door of Tipton's prison. It was padlocked.

"Stop that shouting inside!" he thundered, kicking the door heartily. "Stand back! I'm going to shoot off the lock."

He drew one of the guns he had taken from the blacksmith and fired upon the padlock. It was the staple which tore loose. Wresting the lock from its fitting, he flung open the door and sprang inside. He was met with Tipton's frantic rush to get out. Instantly he jammed the muzzle of his gun into the madman's stomach.

"Get back!" Donald grated harshly. "Back up, you locoed fool!"

Tipton went deathly pale as he stared at the drawn, lean face with the disfiguring stubble of black beard which confronted him.

"You!" he gasped. "McKay!"

"Yes, McKay! And here, thanks to you!"

An exclamation in a woman's voice caused Donald to turn his eyes toward the corner of the little cabin. He almost dropped his gun in amazement as he recognized the figure of Janice Sutherland. Tipton, crazed with excitement, attempted to take advantage of the opportunity. He knocked the Maverick's gun-arm aside and lunged toward the door.

With the swift grace of a panther Donald thrust out his foot and neatly tripped the big man. Tipton crashed to the floor, where he lay stunned and breathless for a moment.

"How dare you attack my father?" cried an enraged voice, and Roberta Tipton darted forward from the other side of the room.

Donald gave her scant ceremony.

"Shut up!" he grunted as he grasped Tipton by the collar and hauled him to one side so he could close the door.

He slammed the oaken barrier shut and dropped the heavy bar in place just as a fusillade of shots rang out from the hollow, to be answered by a crashing volley from the mountainside.

Tipton got slowly to his feet. His daughter brushed him off solicitously. He put an arm about her and faced the Maverick defiantly. Janice Sutherland remained where she had stood and watched the little tableau in silence.

"You hunt a hole when lead starts flying, you don't go promenading," Donald explained shortly.

"WHAT are you going to do with us?" demanded Tipton.

"Keep you here until the fight is over. Miss Sutherland, what on earth are you doing here? I sent you word to flee. Is your father crazy?"

Janice frowned in pretty bewilderment at this query.

"I don't understand," she said. "When did you send me a—"

"What fight?" the railroad president interrupted eagerly. "Who's fighting? What has happened? Who was blasting?"

"Nemesis is about to overtake Eagle's Nest," Donald replied. "From what I saw and heard I take it that an experienced fighter is at the head of the posse besieging this place. The tunnel was dynamited shut, and they climbed the mountain on foot during the night when there was no lookout to see them. Thank God, Bess Nelson got through safely!"

"And you hide in here while your confederates are being shot down?" exclaimed Roberta scornfully. "You coward!"

"Lie down on the floor!" was the Maverick's answer to this, suiting the action to the word. "All of you."

Without the least demur Janice Sutherland obeyed. Tipton followed suit, pulling at his rebellious daughter.

"I won't!" she cried angrily. "Nothing can make me act so foolish. Why—"

A stray bullet found entrance into the cabin through the clay chinking between two logs, hummed across the room like a mad hornet, and thudded into the opposite wall. Like a needle drawn to a magnet the heiress to the Tipton fortune and spoiled pet of St. Louis and Chicago society dropped to the floor in a ludicrous attitude.

All four of them lay flat as the firing without grew in volume.

"My word!" mumbled the railway president, conscious of the loss of dignity. "What a ridiculous situation."

Fully half an hour went by as the rifle battle waged furiously. Then, as the morning light grew stronger and the outlaws discovered that their attackers were well hidden behind rocks and the various thickets on the side of the peak, besides having the advantage of position, the firing appreciably slackened.

Donald got up and crept to the side of the window looking toward the heart of the hollow. Cautiously he peered out. He saw two men and one horse lying in the open. Then from the doorway of Oliver's cabin he observed Jack Maple waving a dingy white petticoat borrowed from one of the women.

The firing ceased altogether. The fight was over, and Eagle's Nest had fallen. In less than one hour from the moment of blasting shut the tunnel mouth the bandits had surrendered—the "impregnable" stronghold had been taken simply and effectively by surprise.

An unseen man on the steep mountainside made a megaphone of his

hands and shouted instructions down into the bowl.

"All right," he called. "We've quit shooting. All of you men walk out of your cabins to the middle of the clearing and stack your guns by that dead horse. Disarm the two men laying there, too. Then line up fifty feet beyond with your faces turned the other way. We'll give you just ten minutes to do it. Don't try any treachery. Enough men will remain up here to keep you covered with rifles."

Very promptly these orders were carried out. As the last bandit took his place in the line of prisoners, a small group of men appeared on the winding path and descended into the bowl-shaped depression. To the watching Maverick's astonishment he observed the spare, erect form of Colonel Sutherland heading the victors. A rough-looking tramp strode at the rancher's heels.

THE ten or twelve men who followed them proceeded at once to inspect and truss up the waiting outlaws. As his companions got to their feet, Donald unbarred and flung open the cabin door. Like a mad bull W. Claude Tipton rushed out. He was followed by his daughter who flashed one look of unutterable contempt at the Maverick as she went.

Before following, Janice Sutherland looked pityingly at the silent man by the window. To his surprise there were tears in her eyes.

"You aided them immeasurably by keeping us in here out of their line of fire," she said. "But, oh, Donald McKay, I begged you to leave this country. You don't know how sorry I am you are here."

And she was gone. When Donald, following more slowly, next saw her, she was in the arms of her father, laughing and sobbing alternately.

"There, that's the man!" the voice of Tipton broke upon his ears. "I denounce him as the leader and secret chief of this band of outlaws. Disarm him!"

The rough-looking tramp swung his rifle to cover the Maverick, but he shook his shaggy head slowly.

"Put 'em up, mister," he advised Donald. "Anybody else in the house?"

The Maverick shook his head.

"He may be the leader," went on the tramp, "but he isn't the chief. Jim Harvey confessed to that honor last night when we arrested him."

"Harvey?" exclaimed Donald and Tipton together.

"Harvey," repeated the tramp briefly.

"You're crazy!" announced the railroad president angrily. "I accuse this man as being the main criminal."

"You're wrong," rejoined the tramp curtly.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded Tipton in rising choler.

"Well," replied the tramp, and he grinned ironically, "I'm merely that incompetent chief of your detective staff who just dropped in to study your methods of capturing train robbers."

"Kilgore!" ejaculated his employer in some confusion.

"The same," agreed Kilgore. "Now, young fellow, just who are you? You're not Oliver?"

"That," cut in Colonel Sutherland, "is McKay."

"McKay?" almost howled Kilgore. "McKay? Why didn't you say so before? Mr. McKay, will you shake hands with a man who wants to make your acquaintance?"

"I fail to understand this," said Tipton in bewilderment, while both

young women stared strangely at the figure of the Maverick.

"McKay," explained Kilgore, secretly relishing each thrust he gave his employer, "is a special U. S. deputy working under the Federal man in charge of this case. It is due to McKay that we got here so promptly and captured this place so easily. Colonel Sutherland, who generaled this assault, hoped that McKay would manage to protect you and the two ladies during the attack. It looks as if you owe him an apology."

Whatever else he was, W. Claude Tipton was a man big enough to acknowledge his mistakes. He did so handsomely. But the Maverick was strangely unresponsive to all advances.

"You called me Oliver," he said to Kilgore. "Oliver is a heavy-set, middle-aged man with a short black beard. He went up to the lookout post just before daybreak. Didn't you see him? Didn't you get him? I heard one rifle shot up there just after the dynamite blast."

Sutherland and Kilgore looked at each other in swift alarm.

"Come on," ripped out the detective, and led the way up the mountain path at a furious pace.

FAR up the sharp incline, not a stone's throw from a little platform built of rock, they found a mutely eloquent answer to their query. A cowpuncher of the WR outfit lay at the edge of the well-worn path, a neat bullet hole almost in the center of his forehead.

Colonel Sutherland, panting for breath, gasped out a curse as he recognized his man. The Maverick, his face gone almost gray, dropped to his hands and knees and began examining the ground. He arose quickly and trotted up to the rock platform, his eyes on the ground about him. He stooped and retrieved a lone rifle shell. Then he started off across the shoulder of the peak toward the north until the ramp-like ridge where it joined Lookout Butte was in view. The rancher and the detective followed him.

As they reached their objective, Kilgore uttered a sharp exclamation. The whole story was plainly to be read now even by one unused to following trails.

The outlaw captain had been at the lookout when the cordon of the attacking force had been spreading out below him preparatory to closing down on the outlaws' hollow. When he heard the blast of dynamite and realized what had been done, Oliver knew that his stronghold was doomed. He had set about escaping.

One man, the WR puncher closest to him, had seen him. Oliver had shot him before an alarm could be given. Posse and outlaws alike had taken that shot to be a gun fired by one of the besiegers merely as a warning.

"The devil's got away," said the colonel bitterly. "He was smart enough to stampede all our hosses, and we can't get any of th' outlaws' hosses out of this place without slings."

"It was my fault," groaned Kilgore. "I should have left two or three men with the horses. But I was so sure we'd have them all bottled up back there."

The Maverick had said nothing from the moment he started up the mountainside. He said nothing now as he gazed down the sloping ridge and across the intervening mountain ranges toward the north. The one man he really hated, the sole outlaw he had wanted captured, had escaped. Shorn of the strength of his band, alone, and a fugitive it was true. But he had got

away at the price of another human life. The hand of the law had failed to grip him. Nothing else mattered to the Maverick at this bleak moment.

"Well," observed Kilgore philosophically, "there's nothing to do but get the horses out of this trap and follow him. He can't escape in the end. I'll—hey, McKay! Where are you going?"

The Maverick had suddenly started on down the precipitous descent of the butte. He did not answer.

"McKay!" called the old ranch owner in swift understanding. "He's had nearly an hour's start. Yuh can't catch up with him afoot."

The Maverick neither halted nor replied in words to this, but the blood-curdling war whoop of a Cherokee Indian on a blood trail smote their astounded ears.

CHAPTER XX.

DESERT NEMESIS.

IT was mid afternoon, not far from the southern rim of the Painted Desert. The sun, despite the fact that it had begun its slide down the long slope of the day to the caverns of night, blazed pitilessly out of a cloudless sky. In the middle of this vast expanse of country, from horizon to horizon, there was no sign of human habitation.

The emptiness was enough to make one's eyes ache. The very solitude seemed to shriek aloud. It was, oddly enough, a day and a scene strikingly like one that had occurred about twelve years previous on the plains of southwestern Kansas.

To the eye of the vulture wheeling gracefully far up against the vault of heaven the great map spread out below was lifeless and deserted save for the two lone black dots which moved at a snail's pace in a northerly direction.

There was one peculiarity about these moving dots that the vulture had noticed since the moment the second dot had come under his observance. They traveled, one behind the other, in exactly the same wavering line, as though they followed an invisible serpentine slot across the prairie. The only appreciable difference was that the second dot was slowly but surely overtaking the first. In the beginning they had been five miles apart; now scarcely a mile separated them.

His curiosity excited, the scavenger dropped lower in an effortless swoop to investigate these puzzling dots at closer range. They resolved themselves into two men who plodded wearily forward on foot. It was obvious that the trailer sought to overtake the leader, and that each was aware of the other's presence. They were, subject to the dips and swells in the country they traversed, occasionally in sight of one another now.

The man in the lead looked the more muscular and powerful individual of the two. He was fully clothed, his face protected by a close-cropped black beard, and he clung tenaciously to a rifle. However, he limped frightfully as if because of blisters, and he stumbled and staggered slightly as he walked. Although his boots were not the high-heeled cowpuncher type of footgear, he walked as though this means of travel were not customary with him.

The pursuer was slighter of build and cleaner cut of limb. Moreover, he walked with the free, effortless swing of one thoroughly practiced in the art of traveling on foot through sandy country. However, to the keen eye of

the bird, there was fatigue in his movements. He carried no long fire-stick with him. Neither did he wear a hat, which was a sign of madness in the desert; though he had fashioned a weird-looking cover for his head, out of his vest. It was impossible to judge which man was going to prove the first prey for Mr. Buzzard, although he slightly favored the madman who had no gun.

Such was the net observation of the vulture. What the bird had not seen and could not understand was the story of the thirty miles of heartbreaking flight and pursuit from Lookout Butte at sunrise to this desolate spot beyond the northern limits of the Sutherland range. Yet this story was easy to read in the trail that the second man so relentlessly followed.

IN setting out on foot from Lookout Butte on the trail of his mounted enemy, hatless, foodless, and without a long range weapon, Donald McKay had done an illogical thing. It was neither reasonable nor hopeful for a white man to attempt to match his legs against those of a horse. But the Maverick had ceased to be a product of civilization. He had reverted to the primitive instincts which slumber beneath the exterior of the most cultured being. He had become an avenging savage, but a far more terrible savage than any other white man could have been under the same circumstances.

To his aid he summoned the wild existence of his youth. His body was like toughened steel. He was accustomed to hardship and privation. His leg muscles had learned fleetness, endurance, and ability in covering all kinds of country tirelessly. The years spent on the desert with the mad prospector John Whitman, plodding steadily from sunrise to sunset, had put the stamina in muscles already trained to endure hardships.

As he followed the trail of his enemy at a comfortable dog-trot, reading the signs as easily as most people read a printed page, at his shoulder sped the spirit of the dead renegade Lone Eagle, sharpening his eyes, s t e e l i n g his muscles, lending the red man's cunning to his cunning, instilling in his heart the Indian's heritage of fortitude. All of his life before went to prepare him for this hour.

To counterbalance this, all that William Oliver had was a scant hour's start on a horse which had already been ridden all night and the rifle with which he had killed the WR puncher. He had no bandolier of extra cartridges.

The town of Ophir, and every other settlement, had suddenly become barred to him. He had been cut off as neatly from the store of loot in the third cavern at Eagle's Nest as if the entire move had been planned and practiced for days.

There was nothing left for him save flight on his choice of the posse's thirty jaded horses. At least he could take them all so as to leave his enemies afoot. He did so, and cursed his luck instead of being thankful for his escape.

Handicapped by the extra twenty-nine animals, saddle horses though they were, the fugitive did not make quite as much speed as the man who followed him at that mile-eating dog-trot. This fact the Maverick read in the trail he followed. By the depth and spacing of the myriad hoofmarks he was able to make a comparison of gaits and knew that he was gaining. It was absurdly easy to pick out the trail of the horse which carried the man. The imprints were deeper and the tracks

zigzagged behind the others, herding them onward.

Having lost half a mile's start, some five or six miles away from Lookout Butte the fugitive selected another mount for himself and then scattered the other horses widely before riding on alone. This maneuver cost him mileage. When he rode out of the foothills and circled warily to the right of Ophir he was a scant four miles in the lead.

Now, however, he made better progress for a time. He covered two hundred yards to his unsuspected pursuer's one hundred. Had he taken the time to stop and deliberately outfit himself at Ophir with grub, ammunition, and a fresh horse he might have escaped. But panic begets panic. He was afraid to stop. He pushed his tired mount cruelly, thinking to supply his wants at some outlying ranch or farm directly in line with his flight toward southeastern Utah.

He gave the Sutherland ranch a wide berth. He stopped for water at a little stream and cursed because there was no canteen on the saddle that he could fill. Ignoring the growing sand in the soil, he bore northward. He was headed now for desert country.

And then the slight limp he had paid no attention to in his horse leaped into vital prominence. The animal went lame. This was a misfortune. He dismounted and carefully examined the left forefoot. There was nothing he could do. The trouble was a badly strained tendon. Nothing short of a week's complete rest would cure the animal's ailment.

He cursed himself now for not having stopped. But it was too late. He remounted and went on at a slow walk while his hard eyes searched the landscape for some sign of human habitation or a grazing horse he could capture. There was nothing.

ONE hour later his pursuer knew of the catastrophe which had overtaken him, and the Maverick's weary legs lost some of their fatigue. The fugitive was but three miles ahead of him now, unless he had found another horse. This was an ever-present contingency. But Oliver had fled into a country where there were no spare horses.

The sun broiled high in the heavens. Both men, as well as the crippled beast, suffered. Without halting in his grim pursuit, the Maverick removed his vest and twisted it about his head for protection against the penetrating waves of heat. He felt the growing heat reflection from the ground beneath him and in great satisfaction noted the increase of sand with its accompanying hard travel.

It was about this time that the outlaw discovered he was being followed by a lone figure on foot that moved faster than his lamed horse. Cursing vilely, he realized that he must abandon the beast or wait for his pursuer to come up. He could not make out the identity of his determined follower, but he did not make the mistake of thinking for one minute that the other was aught save an enemy.

He laughed and shook his rifle at the distant figure. He dismounted and bestowed a brutal kick upon the suffering horse for having failed him. Then, far fresher than his pursuer, he set out on foot.

For a time he gained rapidly, widening the distance between them. An hour passed, and his speed slackened considerably. The blisters which had rubbed on his feet began to break. The spots became raw and gave him ex-

cruciating pain. But still his pursuer pushed him on relentlessly. Relentlessly. It was like a deadly machine trudging after him. It wasn't human.

Oliver began cursing the man aloud, talking to him, arguing with him, sneering at him. But all the while a creeping chill fed upon his spirit and grew. He knew that he would never shake off that inexorable demon who dogged his footsteps, but he pushed on, hoping against hope.

He was suffering as he had never suffered before. Primarily a horseman, his feet had never known the terrible agony they felt now. A numbness paralyzed him from the hips down. This helped to deaden the pain of raw and bleeding feet, but it made every step a Herculean effort which lasted for centuries.

The space between himself and his following Nemesis slowly but surely lessened. Three-quarters of a mile! One-half mile. Now, only a quarter. It was fiendish! He was stumbling to his knees.

At last he could go no farther. He flung himself down beyond a little sandy hummock and leveled his rifle along his back-trail at the plodding figure. Three hundred yards. Two hundred yards.

He knew the man now. That damnable man of mystery called the Maverick. One hundred yards, and the sun glinted on his rifle barrel.

Still he held his fire. As long as the fool came toward him there was no need to waste a shot. What was the matter with the man, anyhow? Surely by now he could see Oliver. Did he think him dead? Or had he failed to note the rifle?

Fifty yards. And still he came on. The outlaw could make out his features now. The expression was so set and grim that Oliver delayed no longer. He sighted along his gun and pulled the trigger. A mere click was the answer which mocked him.

Now, stark fear gripped the fugitive's vitals. He jerked the cartridge ejector with a hand that trembled from more than fatigue. A glance showed him the magazine was empty. He had used the gun at the WR ranch; his shot at the guard at Lookout Butte had been his last cartridge!

Unreasoning panic possessed him. He grabbed one of his six-shooters and emptied it wildly, as rapidly as he could fire, at the steadily approaching figure. The sandy soil leaped up in miniature geysers around the Maverick, but the man himself was untouched.

The range was too great for Oliver's skill with a six-shooter. Forty yards! Thirty yards! And Oliver suddenly remembered that the Maverick had killed Tom Stohl with one shot at thirty yards.

OLIVER'S enemy was looking into his eyes by now. A terrible grin distorted the pursuer's face, and his hands were working grotesquely. But his steady pace never altered. He swung forward at a heavy, trudging walk which had the element of horror in it.

The outlaw's nerve broke. It was the end for the cowardly murderer. He leaped to his feet and ran, screaming hoarsely as he fled.

Without the slightest change of expression, the Maverick swerved in his course and followed at the same weary pace. For a hundred yards under the slanting rays of the sun the queer race continued. Then the fleeing man stumbled and fell prone on his face. He lay thus without movement. There was no sound save the steady *crunch-crunch*

of sandy soil under the plodding feet of the human Nemesis behind.

The vulture far overhead spiraled lower to be in at the death. As he watched with his keen eye, the two dots melted into one. There was a sustained convulsive movement, a shot which sounded muffled, a gradual cessation of motion, and the vulture settled down in commendable patience to await his repast.

As he closed in on his mortal enemy, Donald observed that the man had lain so quietly in order to recuperate all of his strength possible. As he reached Oliver's side, the desperate outlaw rolled over and met his onslaught with the ferocity of a trapped wild thing.

But the Maverick was insensible to pain. All that filled his mind was the necessity of gripping that thick column of neck beneath the short, black beard. He lurched forward, oblivious of the snarling, snapping fury of his victim, and found his hold. His two hands encircled Oliver's throat and slowly began a constricting movement, which was just as deliberate and just as relentless as had been his pursuit.

"Remember a morning in Kansas twelve years ago!" the Maverick grated hoarsely, a command instead of a query. "A horse trader named McKay. And a boy. You killed the man and left the boy to die. Remember!"

The other man was unable to answer, but the dawning expression of horror in his eyes showed that he recalled the incident only too well. The only sound he made was an ominous gurgle in his throat.

"Damn you!" the crazed Maverick was sobbing now. "I am that boy. And he was my father!"

The outlaw read his death in that awful face which glared not six inches from his own. With one last despairing exertion he ceased struggling and bent all his efforts toward pulling his remaining six-shooter. His face blackened with congested blood and a vast roaring filled his head, but the comforting feel of the butt of his .45 held him to consciousness. Dizzily he thrust the muzzle up against the back of his mortal enemy and pulled the trigger.

He felt the body of the Maverick quiver above him, but the terrible pressure about his throat did not relax. He attempted to fire again. He could not command his muscles, and oblivion claimed him.

Long after the vicious soul of Bill Oliver had fled, the Maverick continued to grip that ugly throat. Then his utter fatigue and the reaction to the shock of his wound engulfed him. His head sank between his arms like that of a child going to sleep. Everything became hazy to him. As his face came to rest with his nose just touching the beard of the dead man, the smell of human whiskers carried him back across the years.

"Daddy, I said I wanted to die," was his last conscious thought. "Perhaps it's just as well."

And the sun-kissed world blotted into night about him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BRANDING OF THE MAVERICK.

IT was sundown when the hard-riding posse reached the spot. The dismal flapping of vulture wings as the disturbed birds arose from that dark mass ahead of them on the sandy plain sent a pang of fear through their hearts. Then the mad babbling of a man in delirium turned fear to ghastly uncertainty. Which?

They found the Maverick still

clutching the throat of the dead man. He was raving to the corpse.

When they freed his stiffened hands and laid him on the side of his face in order to examine the bullet wound in his back, it was Janice Sutherland's lap which cradled his head.

The wound, thanks to the sharply tilted position of Oliver's gun, was not mortal. The bullet had struck the shoulder blade, chipping out several slivers of bone, and had glanced outward. A fraction more tilt, and Oliver would merely have fired his gun upward along the Maverick's back.

For a matter of six days Donald lay and moaned in the grip of delirium. And for six days he babbled aloud as he relived the story of his life. To the shocked ears of his listeners he laid bare a story of tragedy and lonely grief which was appalling. It told them more about the character of the Maverick than he could have intentionally imparted in a year of steady talking.

At the end of the sixth day he fell into an exhausted coma which lasted forty-eight hours. When he opened his eyes on the afternoon of the eighth day there was the light of sanity in their depths, and the doctor reported that he would live.

He found himself in a vaguely familiar bedroom with a low-beamed ceiling and bright Navaho blankets on his bed. As he stared around weakly in an attempt to recall it, the door opened and the spare, white-headed figure of Colonel Sutherland entered. Instant recognition came to Donald. He was back in the guest room of the Sutherland ranch where he had spent one night, a thousand years ago.

"Howdy, son," the old rancher greeted. "Feelin' better?"

"Much better," Donald whispered. "Just weak, I think."

"Too weak to have a lil company for a few minutes?—a couple of young ladies who'd like to visit yuh."

Donald's face flushed slightly and he nodded his head.

"Ask them in," he said eagerly.

The colonel went to the door and beckoned.

Into the room came the radiant figure of Roberta Tipton. Her proud face was mysteriously softened and humble, her manner meek and almost pleading. But she was beautiful, and the sick man's heart beat rapidly at the sight of her.

Behind her came the daughter of Colonel Sutherland. Janice's dark beauty contrasted prettily with the fair coloring of Roberta. For the first time Donald saw them both at their best, and he could not say which was the more beautiful. Each was a foil for the other.

But this was not all. After the two girls other persons crowded into the room. In succession the Maverick recognized Claude Tipton, Gregory Baines, and then the welcome figure of Ben Lawrence. It took on the appearance of a reception instead of a sickroom visit.

FOR a moment there was a cheery confusion of greetings and handshakings. Even Baines, as immaculate as ever except for the livid mark across one temple, greeted the Maverick with genuine warmth. It was a moment such as Donald had never experienced before.

Then, to his amazement, Roberta Tipton sank to her knees beside his bed. She gazed deeply in his blue eyes so like her own.

"Donald McKay," she murmured softly but clearly, "I have done you an awful injustice. Donald, I have real-

ized my mistake, and you will never know how sorry I am for—for everything. Can you forgive me?"

"Please," he protested feebly. "Please don't put me in this light. You have done nothing that I must forgive."

A swift light of gladness lit up the girl's face, and she pressed his thin hand tight against her heart.

"Then you do forgive me?" she cried out. "You do? Everything between us is as it was at first?"

"Of course," responded Donald as heartily as he could speak, quite innocent as to Roberta's real meaning. And he raised his eyes to smile in happy bewilderment on the solemn circle of listeners.

It was on the face of Janice Sutherland that his glance first fell. And he read that in her face which almost stopped his heart from beating. At the look of astonishment which was reflected in his expression, Janice Sutherland hastily composed her features and smiled tremulously.

But the damage had been done. He had been vouchsafed a look into the inner depths of her heart. He suddenly understood exactly what Roberta Tipton meant—and what his own heart was saying. As an experienced prospector, he had learned to distinguish pure gold from iron pyrite.

His imprisoned hand lay passive in the clasp of the golden beauty close beside his bed, but his eyes remained fixed on the face of the second woman.

"Janice," was his whisper. And then again: "Janice."

For a long moment Roberta Tipton stared into his face. Then she slowly released his hand and got to her feet. All the light had gone out of her face, leaving a cold and pinched beauty.

W. Claude Tipton cleared his throat hastily. "I guess we had better see about packing our things, Baines," said he. "We are leaving to-night, you know. Colonel Sutherland, I'm mighty glad to have known you and more than glad that we've straightened up the little tangle between us. Good luck to you, McKay. You deserve it if any man ever did."

Gregory Baines came forward smoothly to Roberta Tipton. She stared into his complacent face for an instant that was an eternity. Then, with an inaudible sigh, she accepted his arm.

AS the three Easterners left the room, Janice obeyed the look in the Maverick's eyes. She drew near the bed hesitantly. Then, suddenly, she was crying on his shoulder.

"Don't," protested Donald in anguish. "You people know nothing about me. I'm just a maverick."

"I was the first person to see you when you strayed on this range," cried out Janice, raising her head and smiling through her tears. "And I'll put my brand on you right now."

She kissed him full on the mouth.

"There, Donald McKay!" she murmured a trifle shakily. "Will you marry me?"

The Maverick answered in a very strong voice for such a weak man.

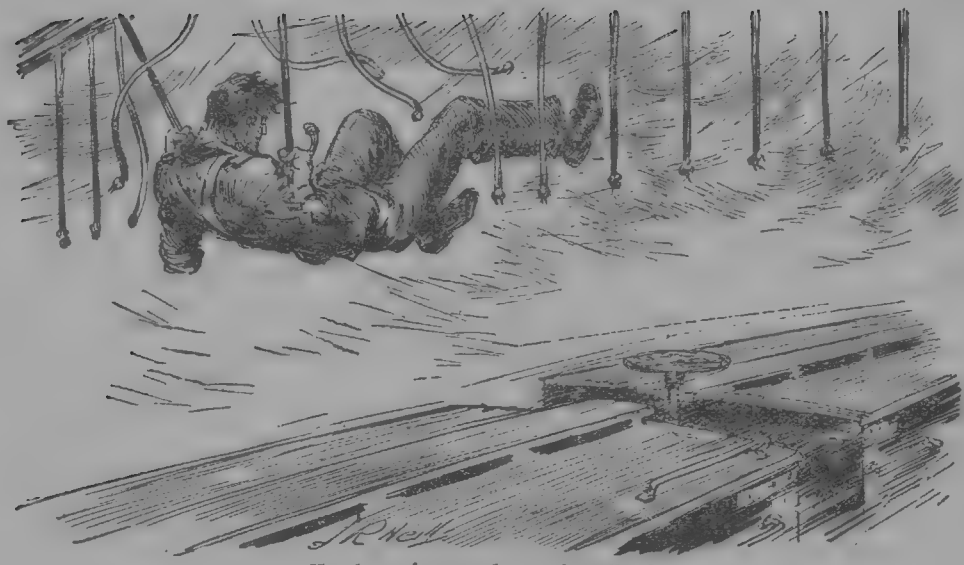
"The first minute you say!"

"Roped, throwed, and hog-tied in five seconds!" roared Colonel Sutherland in joyous mirth.

The Reverend Benjamin Lawrence's stern New England face relaxed in a gentle smile.

"Yes, sir," he agreed. "And I believe that, as tophand on this part of God's range, it is my duty to apply the young lady's branding iron."

THE END.



He clung desperately to the tell-tale

Silk Special

A tempting prize was that trainload of precious cloth; and head brakeman Dickens wasn't going to see it slip away just to avoid a few bullets or a strained boiler

By A. LESLIE

JIM HAWKINS, the yardmaster at Handley, breathed a sigh of relief as the silk train boomed out of Handley yards. The C. & P. had been troubled quite a bit lately with robberies, and what those box-cars contained would tempt any gang of crooks. Of course it was unlikely that such an attempt would be made in the busy yard, where railroad bulls kept a vigilant eye on the valuable cargo, but just the same he was glad it was gone. Let somebody else worry about it now.

Fred Dickens, youthful head brakeman of the silk train, was certainly not worrying. It takes a lot to worry a "shack" with not enough seniority to hold a regular run. Those lithe young knights of the brake-club and lantern usually look on life as a joyous adventure, with an optimism not even the constant dangers of their hazardous calling can shake. Dickens curled up comfortably on the little perch in front of the fireman's seat-box and pitied that industrious individual who, as usual, was busy shoveling coal.

Old Henry Fox, the engineer, eased the throttle a trifle, hooked her up a few notches, and settled himself to watch the ribbon of track forever rushing into the white beam of the headlight. Nothing to do now but keep out of the way of the Virginian, the crack passenger train that would roar through Handley in half an hour. Mile

after mile the flying silk train reeled off; easy miles for Fox and Dickens, not so easy for the laboring fireman. Back in the bounding caboose the conductor and the rear brakeman dozed comfortably.

They boomed down the straight stretch of track just east of Conley. The purring exhaust was stilled, and brake shoes screeched against the wheels. They'd take water at Conley. Then would come the lonely thirty-mile crawl through the cañon, with not a station or block tower to break the monotony—just a solitary track-walker here and there patrolling that dangerous stretch of track. Three miles west of Conley was Coke River Junction, but only a switch stand marked where the Coke River branch left the main line to wind forty miles through the hills to Clothier yards.

There was no need to cut the engine loose for water with this short train, so, as Fox eased the tank into position beneath the spout, Dickens dropped off and ambled back toward the rear, peering at couplings, sniffing for hot-boxes and giving the air line the once over. He was not far from the caboose when the five long blasts called the flagman in, and at Fox's short double toot he swung aboard the last car and began to make his way over the swaying car tops to the engine.

He was halfway there, his lantern bail looped on his arm, a cheerful whistle on his lips, when a dark form suddenly loomed from between two cars.

A hobo, Dickens surmised, and opened his lips to speak. The friendly word of greeting changed to a gasping cry as the shadowy figure leaped toward him and swung a murderous blow. The sky seemed to split asunder in a blast of flame, the brakeman was conscious of a thunderous crash, a numbing pain and a sense of falling. Then black night rushed down as his limp body disappeared between the lurching cars. The shadowy attacker peered into the black space, grunted something unintelligible, and glided stealthily toward the engine.

ONLY the barest chance saved Dickens from instant death beneath the grinding wheels. As he fell he struck the narrow shelf beside the brake wheel shaft, and as he rolled from it the stout strap of his overalls caught on the loose dog of the ratchet. The sway of the car worked the strap beneath the dog, and the unconscious brakeman hung like a sack of grain, bumping against the end of the car, the tough cloth of the strap gradually fraying.

It was the pound and lurch of a stopping and starting train that brought him back to consciousness just as the last strand parted and the severed strap slipped from beneath the dog. Automatically Dickens grasped the upright shaft and clung desperately. His hands slipped, and he slid down the slender iron rod toward the spinning wheels. Only the bumper and his frenzied grip saved him from death beneath the speeding train.

For a few minutes he clung dizzily to the shaft, his senses reeling, pain stabbing at his eyes. Then his head cleared and he stood erect on his precarious perch. Another instant and he was climbing the ladder, rage mounting hotly in his heart. What he would do to that 'bo when he caught him! Dickens reached the car top and sat for a moment on the edge of the roof, an arm around the wheel shaft. He was still rather sick, and he decided to return to the engine and get a lan-

tern and a club before continuing his hunt for the offending 'bo.

The train seemed to be bumping along over an extremely rough stretch of track. Dickens sensed the fact, and was puzzled, for the C. & P. main line had a splendid roadbed. Then he noticed the nearness of the rushing black wall to his left. Had they crossed to the eastbound main line while he was unconscious? He crawled to the right-hand edge of the car and peered over. Then he let out a low whistle of astonishment.

Directly beneath him, it seemed, far down a steep embankment, was a swirling yellow river. The train was not running west on the eastbound main line. There wasn't any eastbound; or, rather, the track they were on was both east and west bound. The silk train was bowling along over a single track road, and there were no single track stretches on the C. & P. main line.

For a moment Dickens goggled down at the tawny water in sheer amazement; then he suddenly scrambled to his feet and stood swaying. A giant bowlder in the middle of the river had caught his eye. He recognized that great rock, and he knew now where he was. He looked back toward the bobbing green lights of the caboose, hesitated, dropped again to his hands and knees, and began to crawl cautiously toward the stuttering engine.

On the rear of the tank, behind a sheltering mound of coal, the brakeman crouched and peered into the dimly lighted cab. He crouched lower as the fire door was flung open and a shovel clanged on the steel deck. Cautiously he raised his head and peered again at the cab. Then he sank back with a soundless whistle. The man wielding the scoop bore no resemblance to rotund Hank Simmons, No. 341's rightful fireman; nor did the tall individual at the throttle bar look in the least like little old Henry Fox.

With painful care the brakeman shuffled back onto the train and crawled toward the rear. A dozen cars from the engine he paused and sat thinking furiously. It was plain to him now what had happened.

Box-car thieves had waylaid the silk train, killed or captured the crew, and turned the train onto the Coke River line, on which no trains ran at night. Evidently they had a definite plan. They would run the train to some lonely spot where, no doubt, they had confederates and trucks. There they would rifle as many cars as possible of their costly cargo and escape while the puzzled railroad officials were still trying to locate the vanished train. Dickens whistled softly at the audacity of the crooks, but was forced to admit the plan perfectly feasible. The thing was how to prevent its being successfully carried out.

ONE thing was certain: he had to get off the train. And one glance at the granite wall hurtling past showed that escape was no simple matter. To drop from a foot rung would mean nothing less than death or serious injury.

Wild thoughts of turning an angle cock and stopping the train flitted through Dickens's mind, but were instantly rejected. With the cliffs on one side and the river on the other, there was no place to hide. The crooks in engine and caboose would round him up in a hurry. No; they evidently believed him killed by the fall between the cars, and they must continue to believe that.

Around a bend the engine lurched, and entered a cut. Dickens spread out flat on the car roof. Blue Hole tunnel was half a mile ahead, and there was very little clearance in that tunnel. All at once he sat up. A plan had come to him—a plan that caused him to catch his breath at the sheer daring of it.

For an instant he w a v e r e d at thought of the frightful danger; but he brushed that aside and crouched, tense and ready, peering through the reek of smoke and cinders.

A breath of wind swept the smoke aside and he saw the tunnel mouth yawning a few hundred yards ahead of the speeding engine. And in the dim moonlight he saw the thing he was looking for—the "telltale," the fringe of ropes that hangs from a crosspiece over the track a short distance from the mouth of a tunnel, to warn any one standing on a car top to crouch low and avoid danger, by rapping him a smart blow on his unsuspecting head.

Very frail appeared the bar resting on rickety poles on either side of the track; and the ropes were old and weather-beaten. But Dickens grimly set his teeth and as the car reached the telltale he sprang and seized a dangling cord.

For an instant Dickens clung. Then the rope broke, and he crashed back upon the car roof. With the train running at that speed it seemed like falling from a housetop. He bounded and rolled, clawing and clutching at the sloping roof, saving himself from going between the cars only by a frantic grab at the brake wheel. In the stifling reek of the tunnel he lay dazed and gasping, blood flowing from his nose and his cut lips. But as the engine roared out of the far end of the tube he was again c r o u c h e d and ready. There would be another telltale at this mouth.

Again he l e a p e d and clung. He swayed and jerked, swarmed up a little higher and gripped the frayed rope with all his strength. The supporting poles swayed crazily and the beam bent beneath his weight; but it did not break, though it groaned and c r a c k e d alarmingly. With almost paralyzed arms Dickens clung to the rope as cars and caboose whisked from under him and roared away in the distance.

With a mighty effort he reached the crossbar, straddled it, and hung until a measure of his strength returned. Then he began to inch along the swaying timber. He reached the pole and slid down, hands torn and bleeding. Completely exhausted, he sank to the ballast and lay gasping for a moment. Then he struggled to his feet and reeled along the right of way toward the deserted station he knew to be but a few hundred yards distant.

AWRATHY man was the operator he r a i s e d at Clothier. Two o'clock in the morning was no time for practical jokes. "G'wan!" he bawled into the mouthpiece of his telephone. "A silk t r a i n on Coke River! Is this your idea of bein' funny, feller?"

The bloody, disheveled brakeman in the little tunnel station thirty miles to the west danced with rage. "Listen, you blankety-blank half-witted this, that and the other!" he howled in a voice that should have covered the intervening distance without aid of the wire. "Can't you understand what I m e a n? Now shut up and get this straight."

The Clothier operator was at last

convinced. "I'll get the sheriff on the wire," he said, "but you know how it is up here. He's five miles away, and there ain't nobody much around the yards. He'll have to try and rustle a posse among the miners. Any idea where they'll stop that train?"

"Can't tell," replied Dickens, "but Hurricane has a road leading over the hills to Huntington, and it runs right down to the track. They might stop there; I wouldn't be surprised if they do. Tell the sheriff to figure on Hurricane, but to watch out for their train anywhere."

Dickens had better luck when he called up Huntington. There was already plenty of trouble in the dispatcher's office there. Wreck trains had been ordered out, and all other traffic was at a standstill, awaiting some word from the vanished silk train. Help would be forthcoming without delay; but Huntington was seventy miles distant.

Dickens banged the receiver on the hook and dashed from the station. There was a section shack close by, and in an instant he had the door open and was trundling out a handcar. He managed to swing it around onto the rails, and a moment later was vigorously pumping in the wake of the stolen train.

A mile he covered, another one, and he was peering alertly through the dark. Hurricane was less than three miles from the station where he had talked, just a lonely little box to accommodate hill farmers who lived back from the right of way. Dickens bore down on the lever and strained his eyes ahead.

Yes, there they were—the glowing red markers of the caboose. His hunch had been correct. For a short distance farther he pumped the car; then he abandoned it and crept cautiously along on foot.

The caboose appeared deserted, but some distance ahead he could hear the sounds of men at work. With great care he made his way along the train, taking advantage of all possible cover. Around a final curve he crawled, and halted.

A few car-lengths ahead was a busy scene. Three giant trucks were backed down to the right of way, and hurrying figures were transferring the precious contents of one of the box-cars to them.

Dickens watched a moment, then began to creep nearer, keeping under the edge of the cars, where the shadows were black.

At the end of the last car he paused. He could see the wrapped bolts of silk coming along in a steady stream as men in the car relayed them to others on the ground.

BUT the stream appeared to be slowing up. Fred heard irritable exclamations from the men on the ground, sharp admonitions to the workers in the car. Finally a head was thrust out the door and a voice snapped an order:

"Get into the car, the lot of you, and help get this stuff out of the ends and down to the door. We'll be here all night at this rate."

Obediently the men on the ground clambered in and disappeared. Dickens could hear them moving about inside, and the clump of the falling silk bolts.

Silent as a wraith he crept toward the lighted opening. Nearer and nearer, his heart thumping madly, his fingers twitching with excitement. A last gliding step, outstretched hands closed on rough wood, there was a low,

grating rumble, a sudden startled curse followed by a furious yell.

Madly the brakeman worked to fasten the door. The hasp didn't want to go over the staple. Then the pin stuck, slid from his fumbling fingers, and dangled on its chain. Somebody dealt the door a terrific kick; it shook as heavy bodies were hurled against it. A sudden muffled explosion, and a bullet slashed through the tough wood scant inches from the brakeman's head. At last the pin was in place. Dickens raced toward the distant engine.

The fire was low, but close to a full head of steam was purring in her boilers. Dickens kicked the cylinder cocks open, slammed the reverse bar down in the corner, and gradually opened the throttle. His trained eye had noted that the cars were bunched and the brake chains slack. Evidently the bandit hogger had stopped the short train with the engine brake, possibly fearing the effect of trainline air in inexperienced hands.

Watery steam hissed through the cocks, the stack grumbled and then boomed wetly. There was a jangle of couplers, a creak of running gear. Again the exhaust boomed, the driving wheels ground over, the side-rods clanked. A sudden thunder of the stack as she slipped on the wet rails. Dickens closed the throttle, opened the sand blowers and widened the throttle again. The drivers gripped, turned, the exhaust began its steady song, wheels screamed on the curve.

Dickens cast a quick glance back along his train. In the pale moonlight he could see the door still closed, but it seemed to him that it was bulging slightly. He glanced at the falling steam gauge, slipped from the seatbox and skillfully threw coal on the fire. A moment later he again carefully scattered coal over the glowing grates. Black smoke poured from the stack, the hand of the steam gauge halted on its downward course, quivered, began to rise.

The great engine was roaring through the moonlight now, picking up speed at every turn of her giant drivers. Dickens sighed with relief; even if the bandits broke the door they would be unable to leave the car. To jump now meant suicide.

HE leaned out the cab window to peer back. Then he whisked in again so abruptly as to tumble off the box. Just above where his head had been was a jagged scar on the metal cab side. The bandits had got the door open at last and were taking pot shots at the "engineer."

The locomotive swung farther around the curve and steel-jacketed bullets hailed against the cab and the tank. Several entered the window and slammed against the boilerhead; one struck the steam gauge a glancing blow and shattered the glass.

Dickens crouched low, peering as best he could through the front window at the white twin ribbons of steel unfolding in the beam of the headlight. He put in more coal, waited a minute, and again heavily fed the flames raging through the flues. The pop valve lifted with a sullen roar and the brakeman reached for the water-injector handle.

The injector kicked back; only steam rumbled in the tank. He shoved the handle shut and tried again. Once more that ominous rumbling, followed by the rattle of steam from the overflow pipe.

Again and again Dickens endeavored to inject water into the boiler, but

it was no use. There was a queer sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach as he realized that the tank was empty. The pop valve was still roaring; a glance at the water glass showed it blank. He tried the lowest cock and got a dry hiss of steam; and as the engine swung around a curve, another shower of lead spattered the inside of the cab.

Dickens glanced at the hills across the river. Landmarks told him he was still several miles from Clothier, but the train was now fairly flying. The heavy engine bounded and swayed over the none too good road bed. The box-cars lurched and careened, their wheels screaming p r o t e s t on the curves, but the brakeman dared not lessen speed. Already there were ominous rumblings in the great boiler. The pop valve was roaring steadily and the monster locomotive was creaking and groaning against the terrific pressure. Dickens crept on hands and knees to the edge of the gangway and peered around the tank. Then he caught his breath sharply and craned his neck farther.

Somebody back in that looted boxcar had nerve, and plenty of it. Hanging by the hands to the roof just above the door was a swaying figure. As the brakeman watched, the bandit drew himself up by a prodigious effort and sprawled on the roof. Then he began to scramble over the bounding cars toward the engine.

Dickens swore luridly and gripped a coal pick. He darted back to the seatbox and widened the throttle a little more. The a l r e a d y flying engine seemed to leave the rails and shoot through the air. The uproar in the straining b o i l e r increased. Dickens tensed for the explosion he momentarily expected.

Crash!

The window just behind him shivered to a thousand fragments. Fred ducked a shower of glass and crouched low behind the steel partition. Another bullet whipped through the opening where the glass had been and banged against the boilerhead. Dickens hurled the seatbox to the deck and huddled in the corner, gripping his coal pick and waiting.

But the bandit sniper knew better than to slide down the coal and fight at close quarters with the desperate man in the swaying cab. He continued to pour a stream of bullets all around the hidden railroader on the chance that a ricochet might reach the mark. The engine roared and howled, the short train tore through the night as if p u r s u e d by a thousand demons. Dickens crouched behind the thin barrier of steel and peered through the front window.

LIGHTS! Red, and yellow, and green. Then white lights, many of them. A terrific clatter of flying wheels on switchpoints. The appalling careen of an engine nearly leaving the rails. Running figures that waved futile arms and lanterns.

Regardless of the death spitting at him from the top of the tender and roaring in the belly of the burned engine, Fred Dickens leaned out of the cab, his eyes fixed on the group of dancing men in front of a small, lighted building, the Clothier yard office.

Almost opposite the group was the flying car that held the bandits. With one sweeping gesture Dickens closed the throttle and slammed on the automatic brake.

Air screamed madly through the escape. The flying locomotive l e a p e d and bucked. Couplers clashed together

like thunder heard under a tin roof. The red and green markers of the caboose danced a mad jig as the "crummy" was nearly stripped of its running gear. The sniper on the tank hurtled head first down the coal, to lie in a broken huddle. Back in the bandit car arose a pandemonium of terrified yells.

Somehow the outraged boiler did not explode. The train ground to a stop, remaining on the rails by some miracle of justice, and armed men swarmed over it.

However, the fight was all taken out of the robbers. That frightful ride through the night had shattered their nerve completely. They surrendered, and were glad to be alive. While the sheriff and his deputies snapped on the handcuffs, other members of the posse were releasing the bruised and battered train crew, who had been bound and shoved beneath the long seatboxes in the caboose.

But Fred Dickens didn't know anything about all this. He lay senseless on the cab floor, his already injured head bleeding from where it had come in contact with the boilerhead when the bucking engine had hurled him to the deck.

Soon afterward, however, he came back to unpleasant consciousness. There were pains galore. He struggled to a sitting position, realized that all his bones were intact, and ventured a feeble grin in answer to anxious questions hurled at him.

"I'm all right," he told the hawk-faced old man who leaned over him, steadying his shoulders with a long arm, "only—ow! What a headache I got!"

The old man chuckled as he finished arranging bandages about the injured cranium.

"Yeah, son, no doubt you have—but when we finally figger all the reward money due you for roundin' up this gang of badly wanted crooks, I expect you'll find that headache is worth jest about five thousand dollars!"

THE END.

The Sundowner

THE "sundowner" is perhaps the most interesting type of tramp to be found in the world. According to world travelers he is not to be found in any country other than Australia. He will not work, but he travels about from one sheep ranch to another, carrying a can for making his tea and a blue blanket for his bed. From the color of his blanket he is sometimes called a "humping bluey."

The sundowners are so named because they always arrive at a sheep ranch at sundown. They call upon the manager, demand shelter for the night and food, and always get it. They are so common that custom has fixed their ration at one pound of flour, half a pound of sugar, and two ounces of tea. In some places little shanties have been put up to accommodate them overnight. Some of these tramps are men who have made a failure in Australia, but many of them are rovers from all over the world, ship deserters, and adventurers who after a season or two move on to some other land.

Addie Gates.

The Men Who Make The Argosy

JAY J. KALEZ

Author of "Swift Water," etc.

SOME thirty-three years ago, old Doc Richter pulled his team of bays up in front of our house, tossed the reins to my dad and did a sprint for our front porch. An hour or so later Doc's job was finished, dad was wearing a grin as wide as a corral gate and the male population of Spokane County had been increased by one. That's the start of everything as far as I am concerned.

I grew up near the town of Spokane, Washington, remember when curbstones started to take the place of barb-wire fences and when names like Harry Tracy and Frank Merrill were used to scare us kids into coming home at dark in place of the bogey man.

So passed a lot of years, then filled with seeming hardships as a youngster upon my dad's ranch; now transformed to treasured memories as a cooped-up city dweller. Then came the War.

As for schooling, I've not much to brag about, so the less said the better. Enough that my ambition leaned toward some day stepping into old Doc Richter's shoes, so, in the spring of 1917, I turned all my worldly possessions into cash and started for Seattle to enter the State University for my pre-medical course. Here coincidence gave me my boot out into the world. Out on the range the war was still just camp talk, but in Seattle, sight of thousands of men in uniform made me realize it was real. Also sight of my first sea-going vessel made me realize a lot more. I enlisted in the Navy.

I was in the service from the spring of 1917 until the fall of 1919. During that time I was transferred to a radio school and gained a radio electrician's rating. As such I served on a freighter, a destroyer, a mine sweeper and last upon a transport. I made a number of trips to France, and as New York was our home port I even began to feel at home there.

Returning home after the War I found that my dad's ranch had fallen to the lure of irrigation ditches and acre tracts. A month and I was back in Seattle signing on as a commercial radio operator. For three years I took in the world, making every port worthy of mention from Singapore to Sydney. Finally I returned to the United States and started taking in the home scenery. Down in a little town in Wyoming I met the one girl. I was married in 1925 and returned to Spokane.

Things weren't going so well for me financially when one day I chanced to read of a contest offering cash prizes for war experiences. I wrote a personal war incident, won a prize and took the writing fever. I've had it ever since.

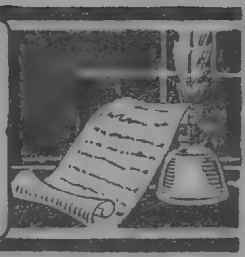
I've had a hundred or more stories published in darn near as many magazines, and hope I can keep on making the editors think my stuff has a cash value. They're a great bunch of fellows, those editors. They give a fellow his living and write you letters as if you're doing them a favor by allowing them the privilege of continuing.

Guess that's about all, readers. Suppose I've had a few exciting things happen in my meandering, but out in this country it's not considered good form to talk about what happened to yourself.

There are always too many other people within pointing distance who could open up with a tale that would make yours sound like a nursery rime.

Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint



"THE serials are seventy-five per cent of the magazine," these readers declare:

Detroit, Mich.

We are writing this letter in response to Charles M. Arthur's letter, asking for fewer continued stories, right after we read his letter. We are sure ARGOSY readers will agree with us when we say that the continued stories are seventy-five per cent of its attractions.

All magazines have short stories. There are magazines especially devoted to certain types of short stories. Such as *Sport Stories* and *Adventure*, where we can read all we want. It is the continued stories that give ARGOSY its novelty. It is there that we have the real value of literature. Short stories are seldom best sellers, while many of your novels later are in great demand in book form. We are not saying to drop the short stories, they are the spice of your magazine, but we do say keep the continued stories.

SAM AND SIDNEY KAPLAN.

WITH this reader also the serials are our chief attraction:

Lowell, Mass.

Just a few words of praise for the many wonderful stories I read in the ARGOSY. I have no favorite type of stories; as long as a story is interesting, I enjoy it. But, however, the serials, especially the book-length novels, have the highest rating.

Rating of book-length novels is one hundred per cent. "The Man of Gold" and "The Legacy of Peril," by Fred MacIsaac; "The Crimson Trail," by J. E. Grinstead; "The Radio Menace," by Ralph Milne Farley, were A-1. "Dead-Line," by J. Allan Dunn; "The Prince of Peril," by Otis Adelbert Kline, and many others were very good. I haven't found one that wasn't interesting. "Tiger Dick's Doubloons," by Don McGrew, and "The Snake Mother," by A. Merritt, promise to be very good.

Shorter serials: ninety per cent. In other words, nine out ten are good "Murder! Murder!" by George F. Worts, and "Forbidden Seas," by R. de S. Horn, were A-1.

Novelettes: seventy-five per cent. "The Death Watch," by Theodore Roscoe, is about the best novelette I read in the ARGOSY. "Snarling Saws," by J. E. Grinstead, and "The Diamond Trail," by George F. Worts, are also very good.

As a rule, I never care very much for short stories; however, some of them that are published in the ARGOSY are very good. The rating is about forty-five per cent. Which, I believe, is a very good rating to receive from a reader who didn't use to care for short stories, don't you?

Most of Theodore Roscoe's stories are very good. Gardner's Whispering Tales are very interesting. Some of *Bill* and *Jim* stories, by Thompson, are very good and others are not so good. "The Liar Tells the Truth," by Harold de Polo, and "Skeleton Wings," by Allan K. Echols, were very good.

Will close, hoping that you will always give as good stories as you are now running.

JOSEPH A. PLOUFFE.

MORE back numbers. Here are some that are offered:

Roundup, Mont.

I see so many inquiries in "Argonotes" by readers asking where they could obtain back numbers. I have back numbers dating with the first issue of the *All-Story Weekly*, March 7, 1914, up to the present time—of course it is now called the ARGOSY—and I would like to dispose of the complete set, and if any readers are interested wish they would write me and make an offer.

Hoping you will publish this letter in "Argonotes" for me, and hope to be a reader for many years yet.

LOUIS KERN.

Bremerton, Wash.

I have read the ARGOSY for years, also the old RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE of long ago. It makes me laugh when I read of the different opinions in your "Argonotes." It is hard to please everybody. In fact, it can't be done. I read every story, and although some of them seem impossible, why criticize them? It takes a variety of stories to make a magazine, and that is what you have done. Why not keep it the way it is? I also take the RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE, and sure enjoy it as I have done a little railroading myself. I notice several calls for old issues of the ARGOSY. I have issues of July, August, September, October, November and December of 1923, all of 1924 (except November 29 issue),

all of 1925, all of 1926 (except October 16 and 23 issues), all of 1927, 1928, 1929 complete. Any one wishing these issues can have them for five cents a copy, they pay the postage.

WM. E. BUSS.

Seattle, Wash.

I have an extra copy of the ARGOSY for September 8, 1923, containing "The Face in the Abyss." The highest bidder gets it.

I also have part one of "The People of the Golden Atom" and parts of "Out of the Moon," by Homer Eon Flint; "Man Who Mastered Time," by Ray Cummings, and "Jason, Son of Jason," by J. U. Giesy.

Some ARGOSY fan who binds stories can probably use these.

HAROLD TANES,
10301 Woodland Park Ave.

AND here are two readers who want to buy:

Rochester, Mich.

Have been a reader of the ARGOSY for a little less than a year, and upon hearing the names of all the stories that have been published, am anxious to secure back numbers. Any one having any back numbers from 1920 to 1930, please write me, stating how many they have and how much they want apiece for them.

ALBERT ROZEK,
323 Woodward.

Winston-Salem, N. C.

I began reading ARGOSY several months ago and wish to say that in my opinion you have the best magazine on the market, barring none. Where else can you get such a mixture of stories for a dime? Where else can you find such a lineup of writers? Where else can you get as much for your money? The answer to all the above questions is *nowhere under the sun.*

As it is customary to name your favorite authors and stories, I will give my list.

The best stories I've seen since I started your wonderful magazine are: "Gambler's Throw," by Eustace L. Adams; "The Legacy of Peril," by Fred MacIsaac; "Dead-Line," by J. Allan Dunn; "The Red Germ of Courage," by R. F. Starzl, and "The Death Watch," by Theodore Roscoe, in the order named.

Authors: J. Allan Dunn, Theodore Roscoe, Fred MacIsaac, Eustace L. Adams, Erle Stanley Gardner, F. V. W. Mason, and so many more I can't begin to mention them.

I think "Gambler's Throw" was the best story I have ever been lucky enough to read. I liked it so well I cut out every part and made them into a little booklet that stands on my library shelf in all its glory. I hope to see more of that type in the pages of the best magazine in the country.

J. Allan Dunn is hardly ever mentioned in "Argonotes," and I think that he is the best writer on your staff. To me his stories seem to live and breathe. When I'm reading his stories the characters seem to stand before me and I can picture the story as I read. His stories are true to life and are not filled with the impossible as many are. Please tell Mr. Dunn to give us more of his underworld stories and that he will always have a stanch supporter in me.

Would like to have all the back numbers of ARGOSY I can get and will give a fiction magazine for every one sent me in good condition. Please print this, Mr. Editor, as some of the readers may have some they'd like to trade. Will take them from October 11 back.

Will close with a plea for more of Dunn's underworld stories.

CLYDE CAUDLE,
233 West Tenth St.

THE sad story of one who has suffered for ARGOSY:

Pittsburgh, Pa.

Have been reading ARGOSY for five years now and have not missed a number, and think it is the best magazine that I have ever read. I am fifteen years old now and will never forget how dearly I paid to start reading ARGOSY. It happened this way.

I was staying with my aunt for the summer, a very pretty young lady and quite a tennis player. One night I was in bed reading ARGOSY which my pal had given me that day. On her way to bed my aunt stopped in my room and came over to the bed to see what I was reading. Picking it up, she looked at the cover and that was enough for her. "Dime novels!" she snapped. "Well, well, I have always wanted an excuse to try out my tennis arm on you." Pulling me out of bed in my pyjamas she took me across her knee and, sitting on a chair, started to smack me with her open hand. It sure did sting after about fifteen minutes, but nothing like what was to follow.

Pausing, I thought it was over and started to get up, but she would not hear of it and said, "Now you are going to get a real spanking." Rolling her sleeve above her elbow, I almost had hysterics when I saw her reach for a hairbrush. "Now for it," she said with a smile, and drew her white arm up with muscle showing—and what a muscle it looked to me! Then she started to lay on the brush, and *how* she laid it on without mercy. The more I yelled and kicked, the harder she spanked. After about twenty minutes she pulled my pyjamas off and started in again on my hide for at least ten more minutes.

I thought she was never going to stop, but after a few more extra hard ones she said, "That will be all for your first spanking and until your

next novel I find." I slept on my face that night and ate standing the whole next day. The next time I visited her, lo and behold, she was reading ARGOSY and she told me that she supposed she had been hasty as it was a good magazine.

So you see what ARGOSY means to me. The stories I like best are *John Solomon*, "Run, Dan, Run!" "Legacy of Peril" and a host of others.

BILLY WESTLAKE.

NOW for a few favorite stories:

San Angelo, Texas.

I should like to voice my opinion of your fine little magazine. I look forward to each Wednesday, so that I may get my weekly thrill.

Of my twenty-four years, six or seven of them have been spent reading the ARGOSY. I must like it, then.

I have just completed "Gambler's Throw," and think it's an ideal story, packed full of speed and thrills, although a little bit overdrawn, nevertheless highly entertaining. I always welcome the *Gillian Hazeltine* stories and am now on "Jungle Justice." I like Loring Brent's stories; in fact, I will always vote for stories such as "That Cargo of Opium," "The Butlers' Ball," and "The Ghost of Locked Inlet." Mystery, murder and romance simply make a story for me. And I find everything I desire in the ARGOSY.

MISS KATHERINE MCDERMOTT.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

12-13

Looking Ahead!

"He's My Meat!"

Jimmie Cordie in Chinese Adventures

By W. WIRT

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GYP WATER

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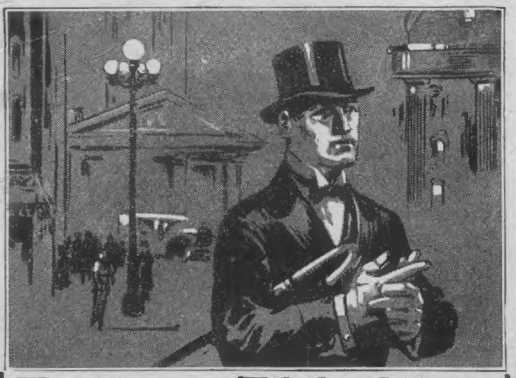

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